

IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME, VOLUME 5

The Captive *and* The Fugitive

Marcel Proust

THE C. K. SCOTT MONCRIEFF TRANSLATION

EDITED AND ANNOTATED BY WILLIAM C. CARTER



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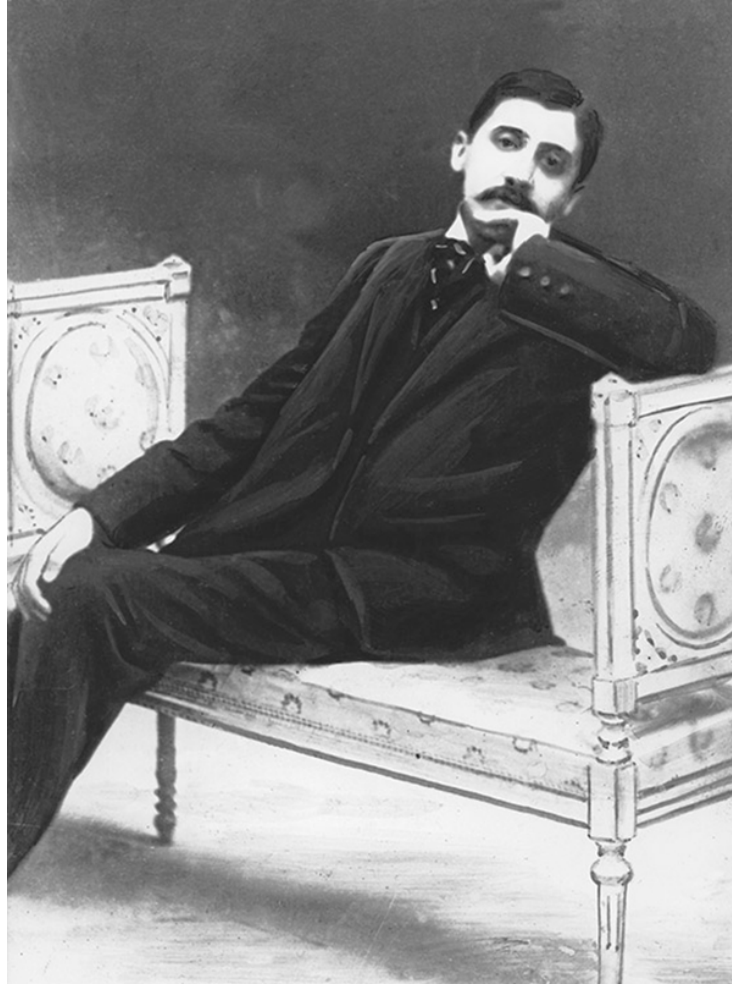
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Introduction

Marcel Proust died on November 18, 1922, at the age of fifty-one. In the last weeks of his illness he had time to revise only the first hundred pages or so of *La Prisonnière* (*The Captive*). This volume appeared in 1923, to be followed by *La Fugitive*, now titled *Albertine disparue*, in 1925 and by *Le Temps retrouvé* (*Time Regained*) in 1927. Scott Moncrieff, alas, did not live to complete his extraordinary achievement by translating *Le Temps retrouvé*, the last volume of Proust's novel. The two volumes included in this book, *The Captive* and *The Fugitive*, were the last of Scott Moncrieff's monumental contribution to Proust and his readers in the anglophone world. His translation of *La Prisonnière* was published in 1929 and that of *La Fugitive* in 1930. He died on February 28, 1930. For the latter title, Scott Moncrieff chose *The Sweet Cheat Gone*, a line from the poem "Ghost" by Walter de la Mare. The best English translation of *Albertine disparue*, although one far from ideal, might be *Albertine Gone*. We have maintained however, as have other editions, Proust's original title, *La Fugitive*. *Le Temps retrouvé* was published in translation as *Time Regained* in 1931 by Stephen Hudson, the nom de plume of Proust's English friend Sydney Schiff, and as *The Past Recaptured* by Frederick A. Blossom in 1932. There have been additional translations since that time.

Scott Moncrieff used as *The Captive*'s subtitle, "My Life with Albertine," a phrase the Narrator uses a number of times throughout the volume. Albertine, loosely held as a "prisoner" in the Narrator's apartment, is the object of his jealous obsession, an obsession that easily becomes indifference once he feels confident of her fidelity. Among remarkable passages we find a highly poetical and erotic one in which he watches Albertine sleeping. Another is the music of the street cries of Paris, whose ambulatory vendors barking their wares have long since disappeared. There are also beautiful meditations on music, especially Vinteuil's newly discovered septet. Charlus's insulting behavior toward the Verdurins leads to a humiliating quarrel that follows the performance of the septet. The volume concludes with the abrupt departure of Albertine.



The Fugitive includes profound meditations on loss and time and memory, the Narrator's sojourn in Venice, and revelations about the prospects and evolution of Gilberte Swann and Robert de Saint-Loup. The volume ends with the Narrator's return to Combray as the guest of Gilberte. He is puzzled and disturbed by his lack of curiosity about the village and its environs. He is also astonished to learn that he completely misread the erotic signal that Gilberte sent him all those years ago when they were both so young at Combray.

Since I have expressed, in the earlier volumes, my wholehearted and sincere admiration for Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff's remarkable skill in translating Proust's novel, I will not repeat that here. Nor will I repeat my earlier explanations of how I approach revising, editing, and annotating these pages. I will say that in this book, as in the earlier ones, I have corrected some errors and have updated usage where appropriate. For example, Scott Moncrieff sometimes translated literally idiomatic

expressions, thus creating phrases that make no sense in English even in context. In *The Captive*, Proust used the expression *voler de leurs propres ailes*, which means to stand on their own feet or to fend for themselves, whereas Scott Moncrieff rendered it as “fly upon their own wings.”

Due to Proust’s untimely death, there are in the last three volumes inconsistencies that he would surely have corrected had he lived to do so. The most glaring of these are characters who die and then reappear in later episodes. I indicate any significant discrepancies in the notes. Proust left no section titles or chapter divisions for *The Captive*. He did however do so for the first two sections of *The Fugitive*: [Chapter 1](#): Grief and Oblivion; [Chapter 2](#): Mademoiselle de Forcheville. Although he did not leave titles for [chapters 3](#) and [4](#), he did indicate where the sections were to end. The titles for those chapters, Sojourn in Venice and A New Aspect of Robert de Saint-Loup, were provided by the editors of that volume, the name of one of whom is unknown. Proust’s younger brother Robert oversaw the editing and the publication of all the posthumous volumes of the novel: *La Prisonnière* (The Captive), *Albertine disparue* (The Fugitive), and *Le Temps retrouvé* (Time Regained).

In addition to consulting a number of standard reference works, I have read and am greatly indebted to the annotated French editions of Proust, especially *À la recherche du temps perdu*, general editor Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 4 vols., 1987–89). The other editions consulted include *La Prisonnière*, 1984, and *La Fugitive (Albertine disparue)* 1986, general editor Jean Milly (Paris: GF Flammarion); and *La Prisonnière*, suivi de *Albertine disparue*, edited and annotated by Nathalie Mauriac Dyer (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1993); *La Prisonnière* and *La Fugitive (Albertine disparue)*, edited and annotated by Thierry Laget (Paris: Robert Laffont), volume 3. I have translated and included passages that are now in standard French editions of the novel but that were not available in the editions that Scott Moncrieff translated.

I also made frequent use of specialized dictionaries or works on Proust, such as *Citations, références et allusions de Marcel Proust*, by Jacques Nathan (Paris: Nizet, 1969); *A Proust Dictionary*, by Maxine Arnold Vogely (Troy, N.Y.: Whitson, 1981); *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to In Search of Lost Time*, by Eric Karpeles (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008); *Le Dictionnaire Marcel Proust* (Paris: Honoré

Champion, 2004); the *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, edited and annotated by Philip Kolb (Paris: Plon, 21 vols., 1970–93); *Selected Letters in English*, vol. 1, 1880–1903, edited by Philip Kolb, translated by Ralph Manheim, introduction by J. M. Cocking (New York: Doubleday, 1983); *Selected Letters*, vol. 2, 1904–1909, edited by Philip Kolb, translated with an introduction by Terence Kilmartin (London: Collins, 1989); *Selected Letters*, vol. 3, 1910–1917, edited by Philip Kolb, translated with an introduction by Terence Kilmartin (London: HarperCollins, 1992); *Selected Letters*, vol. 4, 1918–1922, edited by Philip Kolb, translated with an introduction by Joanna Kilmartin, foreword by Alain de Botton (London: Harper-Collins, 2000).

If not otherwise specified, persons referred to in the notes are of French nationality. However, I do not always indicate the nationality of widely known figures such as Beethoven, Wagner, or Rembrandt. Occasional idiosyncratic capitalizations of common nouns, italic emphases, and quotation marks are Proust's own. All biblical references are to the King James Version. All page references in the notes to *Swann's Way*, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, *The Guermantes Way*, and *Sodom and Gomorrah* are to the Yale University Press editions. In addition to providing factual information in the notes, I try, when appropriate, to provide pertinent biographical information, as well as an indicator of key scenes and thematic words that even the most attentive person may fail to appreciate fully on the first reading.

À LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME

The Captive

At daybreak, my face still turned to the wall, and before I had seen above the big window curtains what tone the first streaks of light assumed, I could already tell what the weather was like.¹ The first sounds from the street had told me, according to whether they came to my ears dulled and distorted by the humidity of the atmosphere or quivering like arrows in the resonant and empty area of a spacious, crisply frozen, pure morning; as soon as I heard the rumble of the first streetcar, I could tell whether it was sodden with rain or setting forth into the blue. And perhaps these sounds had themselves been forestalled by some swifter and more pervasive emanation that, stealing into my slumber, diffused in it a melancholy that seemed to presage snow, or (through the lips of a certain intermittent little person) burst into so many hymns to the glory of the sun that, having first of all begun to smile in my sleep, having prepared my eyes, behind their shut lids, to be dazzled, I awoke finally amid deafening strains of music. It was, moreover, principally from my bedroom that I took in the life of the outer world during this period. I know that Bloch reported that, when he called to see me in the evenings, he could hear the sound of conversation; since my mother was at Combray and he never found anybody in my room, he concluded that I was talking to myself. When, much later, he learned that Albertine had been staying with me at the time and realized that I had concealed her presence from everybody, he declared that he saw at last the reason why, during that time in my life, I had always refused to go out of doors. He was wrong. His mistake was, however, quite pardonable, for reality, even if it is inevitable, is not always conceivable as a whole. People who learn some accurate detail of another person's life at once deduce consequences that are not accurate and see in the newly discovered fact an explanation of things that have no connection with it whatsoever.

When I reflect now that my mistress had come, on our return from Balbec, to live in Paris under the same roof as myself, that she had

abandoned the idea of going on a cruise,² that her bedroom was within twenty paces of my own, at the end of the corridor, in my father's tapestried study, and that late every night, before leaving me, she used to slide her tongue between my lips like a portion of daily bread, a nourishing food that had the almost sacred character of all flesh upon which the sufferings that we have endured on its account have come in time to confer a sort of spiritual grace, what I at once call to mind in comparison is not the night that Captain de Borodino³ allowed me to spend in barracks, a favor that cured what was after all only a passing malaise, but the night on which my father sent Mamma to sleep in the little bed beside mine.⁴ So it is that life, if it is once again to deliver us from an anguish that has seemed inevitable, does so in conditions that are different, so diametrically opposed at times that it is almost an open sacrilege to assert the identity of the grace bestowed upon us!

When Albertine had heard from Françoise that, in the darkness of my still curtained room, I was not asleep, she had no scruple about making a noise as she took her bath, in her own dressing room. Then, frequently, instead of waiting until later in the day, I would go to a bathroom adjoining hers and that had a certain charm of its own. There was a time when a stage manager would spend hundreds of thousands of francs to stud with real emeralds the throne upon which a great actress would play the part of an empress. The Ballets Russes⁵ has taught us that simple lighting effects will create, if trained upon the right spot, jewels as sumptuous and more varied. This decoration, itself immaterial, is not so graceful, however, as that which, at eight o'clock in the morning, the sun substitutes for what we were accustomed to see when we did not arise before noon. The windows of our respective bathrooms, so that their occupants might not be visible from without, were not of clear glass but dimpled with an artificial and old-fashioned kind of frost. All of a sudden, the sun would color this drapery of glass, gild it, and gently discovering in myself an earlier young man whom habit had long concealed, would intoxicate me with memories, as though I were out in the open country gazing at a hedge of golden foliage in which even a bird was not lacking. For I could hear Albertine ceaselessly humming:⁶

Les douleurs sont des folles,

*Et qui les écoute est encor plus fou.*⁷

I loved her so much that I could spare a joyous smile for her bad taste in music.⁸ This song had, as it happened, during the past summer, delighted Mme Bontemps, who presently heard people say that it was silly, with the result that, instead of asking Albertine to sing it, when she had a party, she would substitute:

*Une chanson d'adieu sort des sources troublées,*⁹

that in its turn became “an old jingle of Massenet’s, the child is always dinning into our ears.”

A cloud passed, blotting out the sun; I saw extinguished and replaced by a gray monochrome the prudish, leafy screen of glass.

The partition that divided our two dressing rooms (Albertine’s, identical with my own, was a bathroom that Mamma, who had another at the other end of the apartment, had never used for fear of disturbing my rest) was so thin that we could talk to each other as we bathed in our own, carrying on a conversation that was interrupted only by the sound of the water, in that intimacy that, in hotels, is so often permitted by the smallness and proximity of the rooms, but that, in private houses in Paris, is so rare.

On other mornings, I would remain in bed, daydreaming for as long as I chose, for orders had been given that no one was to enter my room until I had rung the bell, an act that, owing to the awkward position in which the electric pear-push¹⁰ had been hung above my bed, took such a time that often, tired of feeling for it and glad to be left alone, I would lie back for some moments and almost fall asleep again. It was not that I was wholly indifferent to Albertine’s presence in the house. Her separation from her girlfriends had succeeded in sparing my heart any new anguish. It kept it in a state of repose, in a semi-immobility that would help it to recover. But after all, this calm that my mistress procured for me was a release from suffering rather than a positive joy. Not that it did not enable me to taste many joys, from which the intensity of my anguish had debarred me, but these joys, so far from my owing them to Albertine, who in any case I no longer found very pretty and with whom I was bored, with whom I was indeed clearly conscious that I was not in love, I tasted these joys on the contrary when Albertine was not with me. And so, to begin the morning, I did not send for her at once, especially if it was a fine day. For some moments, knowing that he would make me happier than Albertine, I

remained tête-à-tête with the little person inside me, hymning the rising sun and of whom I have already spoken. Of those elements that compose our personality, it is not the most obvious that are most essential. In myself, when ill health has succeeded in uprooting them one after another, there will still remain two or three, endowed with a hardier constitution than the rest, notably a certain philosopher who is happy only when he has discovered between two works of art, between two sensations, a common element. But I have sometimes wondered whether the last of all might not be this little bonhomme, very similar to another whom the optician at Combray used to set up in his shop window to forecast the weather, and who, doffing his hood when the sun shone, would put it on again if it was going to rain.¹¹ This little bonhomme, I know his egoism; I may be suffering from a choking fit that the mere threat of rain would calm; he pays no heed, and, at the first drops so impatiently awaited, losing his gaiety, sullenly pulls down his hood. Conversely, I dare say that in my last agony, when all my other “selves” are dead, if a ray of sunshine steals into the room, while I am drawing my last breath, the little barometric fellow will feel a great relief, and will throw back his hood to sing: “Ah! Fine weather at last!”

I rang for Françoise. I opened *Le Figaro*. I scanned its columns and made sure that it did not contain an article, or so-called article, that I had sent to the editor, and which was no more than a slightly revised version of the page that had recently come to light, written long ago in Dr. Percepied’s carriage, as I gazed at the spires of Martinville.¹² Then I read Mamma’s letter. She felt it to be odd, in fact shocking, that a girl should be living in the house with me. On the first day, at the moment of leaving Balbec, when she saw how wretched I was, and was distressed at the prospect of leaving me by myself, my mother had perhaps been glad when she heard that Albertine was traveling with us, and saw that, side by side with our own trunks (those trunks among which I had passed a night in tears in the Balbec hotel),¹³ there had been hoisted into the “Twister”¹⁴ Albertine’s trunks also, narrow and black, that had seemed to me to have the appearance of coffins, and as to which I knew not whether they were bringing to my house life or death. But I had never even asked myself the question, being all overjoyed, in the radiant morning, after the fear of having to remain at Balbec, that I was taking Albertine with me. But to this proposal, if at the start my mother

had not been hostile (speaking kindly to my friend like a mother whose son has been seriously wounded and who is grateful to the young mistress who is nursing him with loving care),¹⁵ she had become so now that it had been too completely realized and the girl was prolonging her stay in our house, moreover in the absence of my parents. I cannot, however, say that my mother ever made this hostility apparent. As in the past, when she had ceased to dare to reproach me for my nervous instability, my laziness, now she had qualms—which I perhaps did not altogether perceive at the moment or refused to perceive—about running the risk, by offering any reservations regarding the girl whom I had told her that I intended to marry, of casting a cloud over my life, of making me become, in time, less devoted to my wife, of sowing perhaps for a season when she herself would no longer be there, the seeds of remorse at having grieved her by marrying Albertine. Mamma preferred to seem to be approving a choice that she felt herself powerless to make me reconsider. But people who came in contact with her at this time have since told me that in addition to her grief at having lost her mother, she had an air of constant preoccupation. This mental strife, this inward debate, had the effect of overheating my mother's brow, and she was always opening the windows to let in the fresh air. But she did not succeed in coming to any decision, for fear of "influencing" me in the wrong direction and so spoiling what she believed to be my happiness. She could not even bring herself to forbid me to keep Albertine for the time being in our house. She did not wish to appear more strict than Mme Bontemps, who was the person principally concerned, and who saw no harm in the arrangement, which greatly surprised my mother. All the same, she regretted that she had been obliged to leave us together, by departing at that very time for Combray, where she might have to remain (and did in fact remain) for months on end, during which my great-aunt required her constant attention day and night. Everything was made easy for her down there, thanks to the kindness, the devotion of Legrandin, who, gladly undertaking any trouble that was required, kept putting off his return to Paris from week to week, not that he knew my aunt at all well, but simply, first of all, because she had been his mother's friend, and also because he knew that the invalid, condemned to die, valued his attentions and could not get on without him. Snobbishness is a serious malady of the spirit, but one that is localized and does not taint it as a whole. I, on the other hand, unlike Mamma, was extremely glad of her absence at Combray, but for which I would have been

afraid (being unable to warn Albertine not to mention it) of her learning of the girl's friendship with Mlle Vinteuil. This would have been to my mother an insurmountable obstacle, not merely to a marriage as to which she had, for that matter, begged me to say nothing definite as yet to Albertine, and the thought of which was becoming more and more intolerable to me, but even to the latter's being allowed to stay for any length of time in the house. Apart from so grave a reason of which she was unaware, Mamma, under the dual influence of my grandmother's edifying and liberating example, according to whom, in her admiration of George Sand,¹⁶ virtue consisted in nobility of heart, and of my own corrupting influence, was now indulgent toward women whose conduct she would have condemned in the past, or even now, had they been any of her own middle-class friends in Paris or at Combray, but whose lofty natures I extolled to her and to whom she pardoned much because of their affection for me. But when all is said, and apart from any question of propriety, I doubt whether Albertine could have put up with Mamma, who had acquired from Combray, from my Aunt Léonie, from all her kindred, habits of punctuality and order of which my mistress had not the remotest conception. She would never think of shutting a door and, on the other hand, would no more hesitate to enter a room if the door stood open than would a dog or a cat. Her somewhat disturbing charm was, in fact, that of taking the place in the household not so much of a girl as of a domestic animal that comes into a room, goes out, is to be found wherever one does not expect to find it and (in her case) would—bringing me a profound sense of repose—jump into my bed beside me and make a place for herself from which she never stirred, without being in my way as a person might have been. She ended, however, by conforming to my hours of sleep, and not only never attempted to enter my room but would take care not to make a sound until I had rung my bell. It was Françoise who impressed these rules of conduct upon her. She was one of those Combray servants, conscious of their master's place in the world, and that the least that they can do is to see that he is treated with all the respect to which they consider him entitled. When a visitor on leaving gave Françoise a tip to be shared with the kitchenmaid, he had barely slipped his coin into her hand before Françoise, with an equal display of speed, discretion, and energy, had passed the word to the kitchenmaid who came forward to thank him, not in a whisper, but openly and aloud, as Françoise had told her that she must do. The curé of Combray was no genius, but he also knew what was

proper. Under his instruction, the daughter of some Protestant cousins of Mme Sazerat had been converted to Catholicism, and her family had been most grateful to him. It was a question of her marriage to a young nobleman of Méséglise. The young man's parents wrote to inquire about her in a somewhat arrogant letter, in which they expressed their contempt for her Protestant origin. The curé of Combray replied in such a tone that the Méséglise nobleman, crushed and prostrate, wrote a very different letter in which he begged as the most precious favor the award of the girl's hand in marriage.

Françoise deserved no special credit for making Albertine respect my slumbers. She was imbued with the tradition. From her studied silence, or the peremptory response that she made to a proposal to enter my room, or to send in some message to me, which Albertine had expressed in all innocence, the latter realized with astonishment that she was now living in an alien world, where strange customs prevailed, governed by rules of conduct that one must never dream of infringing. She had already had a foretaste of this at Balbec, but, in Paris, made no attempt to resist and would wait patiently every morning for the sound of my bell before venturing to make any noise.

The training that Françoise gave her was of value also to our old servant herself, for it gradually stilled the lamentations that, ever since our return from Balbec, she had not ceased to utter. For, just as we were boarding the train, she remembered that she had forgotten to say goodbye to the housekeeper of the hotel, a mustachioed lady who looked after the bedroom floors, barely knew Françoise by sight, but had been comparatively civil to her. Françoise positively insisted upon getting out of the train, going back to the hotel, saying goodbye properly to the housekeeper, and not leaving for Paris until the following day. Common sense, coupled with my sudden horror of Balbec, restrained me from granting her this concession, but my refusal had infected her with a morbid and feverish bad temper that the change of air had not sufficed to cure and that lingered on in Paris. For, according to Françoise's code, as it is illustrated in the bas-reliefs of Saint-André-des-Champs,¹⁷ to wish for the death of an enemy, even to inflict it, is not forbidden, but it is a horrible sin not to do what is expected of you, not to return a civility, to refrain, like a regular churl, from saying goodbye to the housekeeper before leaving a hotel. Throughout the journey, the continually recurring memory of her not having taken leave of this woman

had dyed Françoise's cheeks with a scarlet flush that was quite alarming. And if she refused to drink or eat until we reached Paris, it was perhaps because this memory heaped a real "weight" on her stomach (every class of society has a pathology of its own) even more than with the intention of punishing us.

Among the reasons that led Mamma to write me a daily letter, and a letter that never failed to include some quotation from Mme de Sévigné, there was the memory of my grandmother. Mamma would write to me: "Mme Sazerat gave us one of those little luncheons of which she possesses the secret and which, as your poor grandmother would have said, quoting Mme de Sévigné, deprive us of solitude without affording us company." In one of my own earlier replies, I was so inept as to write to Mamma: "By those quotations, your mother would recognize you at once." Which brought me, three days later, the reproof: "My poor boy, if it was only to speak to me of *my mother*, your reference to Mme de Sévigné was most inappropriate. She would have answered you as she answered Mme de Grignan: 'So she was nothing to you? I had supposed that you were related.'"¹⁸

By this time, I could hear my mistress leaving or returning to her room. I rang the bell, for it was time now for Andrée to arrive with the chauffeur, Morel's friend, lent me by the Verdurins, to take Albertine out. I had spoken to the latter of the remote possibility of our marriage; but I had never made her any formal promise; she herself, from discretion, when I said to her: "I can't tell, but it might perhaps be possible," had shaken her head with a melancholy smile, as much as to say: "Oh, no, never," in other words: "I am too poor." And so, while I continued to say: "It is quite indefinite," when speaking of future projects, at the moment I was doing everything in my power to amuse her, to make life pleasant to her, with perhaps the unconscious design of thereby making her wish to marry me. She herself laughed at my lavish generosity. "Andrée's mother would be in a fine state if she saw me turn into a rich lady like herself, what she calls a lady who has her own 'horses, carriages, paintings.' What? Did I never tell you that she says that? Oh, she's a character! What surprises me is that she seems to think paintings just as important as horses and carriages."

We will see in due course that, notwithstanding the foolish ways of speaking that she had not outgrown, Albertine had developed to an astonishing degree. This was a matter of complete indifference to me, the intellectual qualities of a woman friend having always interested me so little

that if I ever pointed them out to some woman or another, it was purely out of politeness. Alone, the curious genius of Céleste¹⁹ might perhaps appeal to me. In spite of myself, I would continue to smile for some moments, when, for instance, having discovered that Albertine was not in my room, she accosted me with: “Heavenly deity reclining on a bed!” “But why, Céleste,” I would say, “why deity?” “Oh, if you suppose that you have anything in common with the mortals who make their pilgrimage on our vile earth, you are greatly mistaken!” “But why ‘reclining’ on a bed, can’t you see that I’m lying down in bed?” “You never lie. Who ever saw anybody lie like that? You have just alighted there. With your white pajamas, and the way you twist your neck, you look for all the world like a dove.”

Albertine, even in the discussion of the most trivial matters, expressed herself very differently from the little girl that she had been only a few years earlier at Balbec. She went so far as to declare, with regard to a political incident of which she disapproved: “I consider that formidable.” And I am not sure that it was not about this time that she learned to say, when she meant that she felt a book to be written in a bad style: “It is interesting, but really, it might have been written *by a pig*.”

The rule that she must not enter my room until I had rung amused her greatly. As she had adopted our family habit of quotation, and in following it drew upon the plays in which she had acted at her convent and for which I had expressed admiration, she always compared me to Ahasuerus:

*[Et] la mort est le prix de tout audacieux
Qui sans être appelé se présente à ses yeux.*

*Rien ne met à l’abri de cet ordre fatal,
Ni le rang, ni le sexe; et le crime est égal.*

Moi-même . . .

*Je suis à cette loi comme une autre soumise;
Et sans le prévenir, il faut, pour lui parler,*

*Qu’il me cherche, ou du moins qu’il me fasse appeler.*²⁰

Physically, too, she had changed. Her blue, almond-shaped eyes, grown longer, had not kept their form; they were indeed of the same color, but seemed to have passed into a liquid state. So much so that, when she closed them it was as though a pair of curtains had been drawn to shut out a view of the sea. No doubt this was one of her features that I remembered most vividly each night after we had parted. For, on the contrary, every morning the ripple of her hair continued to give me the same surprise, as though it

were some novelty that I had never seen before. And yet, above the smiling eyes of a girl, what could be more beautiful than that clustering coronet of black violets? The smile offers greater friendship; but the little gleaming curls of blossoming hair, more akin to the flesh, of which they seem to be a transposition into tiny wavelets, are more provocative of desire.

As soon as she entered my room, she sprang upon my bed and sometimes would expatiate upon my type of intellect, would vow in a transport of sincerity that she would sooner die than leave me: this was on mornings when I had shaved before sending for her. She was one of those women who can never distinguish the cause of their sensations. The pleasure that they derive from a smooth cheek they explain to themselves by the moral qualities of the man who seems to offer them a possibility of future happiness, which is capable, however, of diminishing and becoming less necessary the longer he refrains from shaving.

I inquired where she was thinking of going.

“I believe Andrée wants to take me to the Buttes-Chaumont;^{[21](#)} I have never been there.”

Of course, it was impossible for me to discern among so many other words whether beneath these a falsehood lay concealed. Besides, I could trust Andrée to tell me of all the places that she visited with Albertine. At Balbec, when I felt that I was utterly tired of Albertine, I had made up my mind to say, untruthfully, to Andrée: “My little Andrée, if only I had met you even sooner! It is you whom I would have loved. But now my heart is pledged to another. All the same, we can see a great deal of each other, for my love for another is causing me great unhappiness, and you will help me to find consolation.” And now, these same mendacious words had become true within the space of three weeks. Perhaps Andrée had believed in Paris that it was indeed a lie and that I was in love with her, as she would doubtless have believed at Balbec. For the truth is so variable for each of us, that other people have difficulty in recognizing what it is. And as I knew that she would tell me everything that she and Albertine had done, I had asked her and she had agreed, to come and call for Albertine almost every day. In this way I might without anxiety remain at home. Also, Andrée’s privileged position as one of the girls of the little band gave me confidence that she would obtain everything that I might require from Albertine. Truly, I could have said to her now in all sincerity that she would be capable of setting my mind at rest.

At the same time, my choice of Andrée (who happened to be staying in Paris, having given up her plan of returning to Balbec) as guide and companion to my mistress was prompted by what Albertine had told me of the affection that her friend had felt for me at Balbec, at a time when, on the contrary, I had supposed that I was boring her; indeed, if I had known this at the time, it is perhaps with Andrée that I would have fallen in love. “What, you never knew?” said Albertine, “but we were always joking about it. Do you mean to say you never noticed how she used to copy all your ways of talking and arguing? When she had just been with you, it was too obvious. She had no need to tell us whether she had seen you. As soon as she joined us, we could tell at once. We used to look at one another and laugh. She was like a coal merchant who tries to pretend that he isn’t one. He is black all over. A miller has no need to say that he is a miller, you can see the flour all over his clothes; and the mark of the sacks he has carried on his shoulder. Andrée was just the same, she would knit her eyebrows the way you do, and stretch out her long neck, and I don’t know what all. When I take a book that has been in your room, even if I’m reading it out of doors, I can tell at once that it belongs to you because it still reeks of your awful fumigations. It’s only a trifle, still it’s rather a nice trifle. Whenever anybody said nice things about you, seemed to think a lot of you, Andrée was in ecstasies.”

Notwithstanding all this, in case there might have been some secret plan made behind my back, I advised her to give up the Buttes-Chaumont for that day and to go instead to Saint-Cloud²² or somewhere else.

It was certainly not, as I was well aware, because I was the least bit in love with Albertine. Love is nothing more perhaps than the propagation of those eddies that, in the wake of an emotion, stir the soul. Certain such eddies had indeed stirred my soul through and through when Albertine spoke to me at Balbec about Mlle Vinteuil, but these were now stilled. I was no longer in love with Albertine, for I no longer felt anything of the suffering, now healed, that I had felt in the train at Balbec, upon learning how Albertine had spent her adolescence, with visits perhaps to Montjouvain. All this, which I had thought about for so long, was healed. But, now and again, certain expressions used by Albertine made me suppose—why, I cannot say—that she must in the course of her life, short as it had been, have received many compliments, many declarations of affection, and have received them with pleasure, that is to say with

sensuality. Thus, she would say, in any connection: "Is that true? Is it really true?" Certainly, if she had said, like an Odette: "Is it really true, that whopper of a lie?" I would not have been disturbed, for the absurdity of the formula would have explained itself as a stupid inanity of feminine wit. But her questioning air: "Is that true?" gave on the one hand the strange impression of a creature incapable of judging things by herself, who appeals to you for your testimony, as though she were not endowed with the same faculties as yourself (if you said to her: "Why, we've been out for a whole hour," or "It is raining," she would ask: "Is that true?"). Unfortunately, on the other hand, this want of facility in judging external phenomena for herself could not be the real origin of her "Is that true? Is it really true?" It seemed rather that these words had been, from the dawn of her precocious adolescence, replies to: "You know, I never saw anybody as pretty as you," "You know I am madly in love with you, I am terribly excited"—affirmations that were answered, with a coquettishly consenting modesty, by these repetitions of: "Is that true? Is it really true?" which no longer served Albertine, when in my company, except to reply by a question to some such affirmation as: "You have been asleep for more than an hour." "Is that true?"

Without feeling that I was the least bit in love with Albertine, without including in the list of my pleasures the moments that we spent together, I was still preoccupied with the way in which she spent her time; had I not, indeed, fled from Balbec in order to make certain that she could no longer meet this or that person with whom I was so afraid of her misbehaving, simply as a joke (a joke at my expense, perhaps), that I had adroitly planned to sever, at one and the same time, by my departure, all her dangerous entanglements? And Albertine was so entirely passive, had so complete a faculty of forgetting things and submitting to pressure, that these relations had indeed been severed and the phobia that haunted me cured. But that phobia is capable of assuming as many forms as the undefined evil that is its cause. So long as my jealousy was not reincarnated in new people, I had enjoyed after the passing of my anguish an interval of calm. But with a chronic malady, the slightest pretext serves to revive it, as also with the vice of the person who is the cause of our jealousy the slightest opportunity may serve her to practice it anew (after a lull of chastity) with different people. I had managed to separate Albertine from her accomplices, and, by so doing, to exorcise my hallucinations; even if it was possible to make her forget

people, to cut short her attachments, her taste for sensual pleasure was, itself also, chronic and was perhaps only waiting for an opportunity to afford itself an outlet. Now Paris provides just as many opportunities as Balbec.

In any town whatsoever, she had no need to seek, for the evil existed not in Albertine alone, but in others to whom any opportunity for pleasure is good. A glance from one, understood at once by the other, brings in contact the two famished beings. And it is easy for a clever woman to appear not to have seen, then five minutes later to join the person who has read her glance and is waiting for her in a side street, and, in a few words, to plan a rendezvous. Who will ever know? And it was so simple for Albertine to tell me, in order that she might continue these practices, that she was eager to see again some place on the outskirts of Paris that she had liked. And so it was enough that she should return later than usual, that her expedition should have taken an inexplicably long time, although it was perfectly easy perhaps to account for it without introducing any sensual reason, for my malady to break out again, attached this time to mental pictures that were not of Balbec, and that I would set to work, as with their predecessors, to destroy, as though the destruction of an ephemeral cause could put an end to a congenital malady. I did not take into account the fact that in these acts of destruction, in which I had as an accomplice, in Albertine, her faculty of changing, her ability to forget, almost to hate the recent object of her love, I was sometimes causing a profound grief to one or other of those unknown persons with whom she had successively taken her pleasure, and that I was causing them this grief in vain, for they would be abandoned, replaced, and, parallel to the path strewn with all the derelicts of her light-hearted infidelities, there would open for me another, pitiless path broken only by an occasional brief respite; so that my suffering, if I had thought about it, could end only with Albertine's life or with my own. Even in the first days after our return to Paris, not satisfied by the information that Andrée and the chauffeur had given me as to their expeditions with my mistress, I had felt the neighborhood of Paris to be as tormenting as that of Balbec, and had gone off for a few days in the country with Albertine. But everywhere my uncertainty as to what she might be doing was the same, the possibility that it was something wrong as abundant, and surveillance even more difficult, with the result that I returned with her to Paris. In leaving Balbec, I had imagined that I was leaving Gomorrah, plucking Albertine from it; in

reality, alas, Gomorrah was dispersed to all the ends of the earth. And partly out of jealousy, partly out of ignorance of such joys (a case that is rare indeed), I had arranged unawares this game of hide and seek in which Albertine was always to escape me.

I questioned her point-blank: “Oh, by the way, Albertine, am I dreaming, or did you tell me that you knew Gilberte Swann?”

“Yes; that is to say, she used to talk to me in our classes, because she had a set of the French history notes, in fact she was very nice about it, and let me borrow them, and I gave them back the next time I saw her.”

“Is she the kind of woman that I object to?”

“Oh, not at all, quite the opposite.”

But rather than indulge in this sort of investigation, I would often devote to imagining Albertine’s excursions the energy that I did not employ in sharing them, and would speak to my mistress with the ardor that unfulfilled designs keep intact. I expressed so keen a longing to see once again some stained-glass window in the Sainte-Chapelle,²³ so keen a regret that I was not able to go there with her alone, that she said to me lovingly: “Why, my dear, since you seem so keen on it, make a little effort, come with us. We can start as late as you like, whenever you’re ready. And if you’d rather be alone with me, I have only to send Andrée home, she can come another time.” But these very entreaties to me to go out added to the calm that allowed me to yield to my desire to remain at home.

It did not occur to me that the apathy that was indicated by my delegating thus to Andrée or the chauffeur the task of soothing my agitation by leaving them to keep a close watch on Albertine, was paralyzing in me, rendering inert all those imaginative impulses of the mind, all those inspirations of the will, which enable us to guess, to forestall what a person is about to do; it was all the more dangerous in that, by nature, I have always been more open to the world of possibilities than to that of real events. This helps us to understand the human heart, but we are apt to be taken in by individuals. My jealousy was born of mental images, a form of self-torment not based upon probability. Now there may occur in the lives of men and of nations (and there was to occur, one day, in my own life) a moment when we need to have within us a superintendent of police, a clear-sighted diplomat, a master detective, who instead of pondering over the concealed possibilities that extend to all the points of the compass, reasons accurately, says to himself: “If Germany announces this, it means that it intends to do

something else, not just ‘something’ in the abstract but precisely this or that or the other, which it may perhaps have begun already to do.” “If So-and-So has fled, it is not in the direction *a* or *b* or *d*, but to the point *c*, and the place to which we must direct our search for him is *c*.” Alas, this faculty, which was not highly developed in me, I allowed to grow numb, to lose its power, to vanish, by acquiring the habit of growing calm the moment that other people were engaged in keeping watch on my behalf. As for the reason for my reluctance to leave the house, I would not have liked to explain it to Albertine. I told her that the doctor had ordered me to stay in bed. This was not true. And if it had been true, his prescription would have been powerless to prevent me from accompanying my mistress. I asked her to excuse me from going out with her and Andrée. I will mention only one of my reasons, which was dictated by prudence. Whenever I went out with Albertine, if she left my side for a moment, I became anxious, began to imagine that she had spoken to or simply cast a glance at somebody. If she was not in the best of moods, I thought that I was causing her to miss or to postpone some appointment. Reality is never more than a first step toward an unknown element in quest of which we can never progress very far. It is better not to know, to think as little as possible, not to feed our jealousy with the slightest concrete detail. Unfortunately, even when we eliminate the outer life, incidents are created by the inner life also; though I held aloof from Albertine’s expeditions, the random course of my solitary reflections furnished me at times with those tiny fragments of the truth that attract, like a magnet, an inkling of the unknown, which, from that moment, becomes painful. Even if we live in a hermetically sealed compartment, associations of ideas, memories continue to act upon us.

But these internal shocks did not occur immediately; no sooner had Albertine started on her drive than I was revived, were it only for a few moments, by the exhilarating virtues of solitude. I took my share of the pleasures of the new day; the arbitrary desire—the capricious and purely spontaneous inclination to taste them—would not have sufficed to place them within my reach, had not the particular state of the weather not merely evoked for me their images in the past but affirmed their reality in the present, immediately accessible to all men whom a contingent and consequently negligible circumstance did not compel to remain at home. On certain fine days the weather was so cold, one was in such full communication with the street that it seemed as though a breach had been

made in the outer walls of the house, and, whenever a streetcar passed, the sound of its bell throbbed like that of a silver knife striking a house of glass. But it was above all in myself that I heard, with intoxication, a new sound rendered by the inner violin. Its strings are tightened or relaxed by mere changes of temperature, of light, in the world outside. Within our being, an instrument that the uniformity of habit has rendered silent, a song is born of these digressions, these variations, the source of all music: the change of weather on certain days makes us pass at once from one note to another. We recapture the forgotten air the mathematical inevitability of which we might have deduced, and which for the first few moments we sing without recognizing it. These modifications alone, internal though they had come from without, renewed for me the world outside. Communicating doors, long barred, reopened in my brain. The life of certain towns, the gaiety of certain expeditions resumed their place in my consciousness. All athrob in harmony with the vibrating string, I would have sacrificed my dull life in the past, and all my life to come, erased by habit, for this truly unique state.

If I had not gone out with Albertine on her long drive, my mind would stray all the farther afield, and, because I had refused to savor with my senses this particular morning, I enjoyed in imagination all the similar mornings, past or possible, or more precisely a certain type of morning of which all those of the same kind were but the intermittent apparition that I had at once recognized; for the brisk air blew the book open of its own accord at the right page, and I found clearly set out before my eyes, so that I might follow it from my bed, the Gospel for the day. This ideal morning filled my mind full of a permanent reality, identical to all similar mornings, and infected me with a joy that my physical debility did not diminish: for, inasmuch as our sense of well-being is caused not so much by our sound health as by the unemployed surplus of our strength, we can attain it, just as much as by increasing our strength, by diminishing our activity. The activity with which I was overflowing and that I kept constantly charged as I lay in bed, made me spring internally from side to side, with a leaping heart, like a machine that, prevented from moving in space, rotates on its own axis.

Françoise came in to light the fire, and to make it draw, threw upon it a handful of twigs, the scent of which, forgotten all through the summer, traced around the fireplace a magic circle within which, perceiving myself poring over a book, now at Combray, now at Doncières, I was as joyful,

while remaining in my bedroom in Paris, as if I had been on the point of starting for a walk along the Méséglise way, or of going to join Saint-Loup and his friends on the training ground. It often happens that the pleasure that everyone takes in turning over the keepsakes that his memory has collected is keenest in those whom the tyranny of physical illness and the daily hope of recovery prevent, on the one hand, from going out to seek in nature scenes that resemble those memories, and, on the other hand, leave so convinced that they will shortly be able to do so that they can remain gazing at them in a state of desire, of appetite, and not regard them merely as memories, as pictures. But, even if they were never to be anything more than memories to me, even if, as I recalled them, I saw merely pictures, immediately they re-created in me, of me as a whole, by virtue of an identical sensation, the boy, the youth who had first seen them. There had been not merely a change in the weather outside, or, inside the room, the introduction of a fresh scent, there had been in myself a difference of age, the substitution of another person. The scent, in the frosty air, of the twigs of brushwood, was like a fragment of the past, an invisible ice floe detached from a former winter that stole into my room, often striated moreover with this perfume or that glimmer of light, as though with a sequence of different years, in which I found myself once again plunged, overwhelmed, even before I had identified them, by the exhilaration of hopes long since abandoned. The sun's rays fell upon my bed and passed through the transparent shell of my attenuated body, warmed me, made me burn like crystal. Then, like a famished convalescent who has already begun to feast on all the dishes that are still forbidden him, I asked myself whether marriage with Albertine would not spoil my life, not only by making me assume the burden, too heavy for my shoulders, of consecrating myself to another person, but by forcing me to live in absence from myself because of her continual presence and depriving me, forever, of the joys of solitude. And not of these alone. Even when we ask of the day nothing but desires, there are some—those that are excited not by things but by people—whose character it is to be unlike any other. And so, if, on rising from my bed, I went to the window and drew the curtain aside for a moment, it was not merely, as a musician for a moment opens the lid of his piano, to ascertain whether, on the balcony and in the street, the sunlight was tuned to exactly the same pitch as in my memory, but also to catch a glimpse of some laundress carrying her linen basket, a baker in her blue apron, a dairymaid

in her tucker and sleeves of white linen, carrying the yoke from which her jugs of milk are suspended, some haughty golden-haired girl escorted by her governess, an image, in short, which the differences of outline, perhaps quantitatively insignificant, were enough to make as different from any other as, in a phrase of music, the difference between two notes, an image but for the vision of which I would have impoverished my day of the goals that it might have to offer to my desires of happiness. But if the surfeit of joy, brought me by the spectacle of women whom it was impossible to imagine *a priori*,²⁴ made more desirable, more deserving of exploration, the street, the town, the world, it set me longing, for that very reason, to recover my health, to go out of doors and, without Albertine, to be free. How often, at the moment when the unknown woman who was to haunt my dreams passed beneath the window, now on foot, now at the full speed of her automobile, was I made wretched because my body could not follow my gaze, which kept pace with her, and falling upon her as though shot from the embrasure of my window by an arquebus, arrest the flight of the face that held out for me the offer of a happiness that, cloistered thus, I would never know!

Of Albertine, on the other hand, I had nothing more to learn. Each day she seemed to me less attractive. Only the desire that she aroused in other people, when, on learning of it, I began to suffer again and wanted to challenge their possession of her, raised her in my sight to a lofty pinnacle. She was capable of causing me pain, never joy. Pain alone kept my tedious attachment alive. As soon as my pain vanished, and with it the need to soothe it, requiring all my attention, like some atrocious distraction, I felt that she meant absolutely nothing to me, that I must mean absolutely nothing to her. That this state should persist made me miserable, and, at certain moments, I longed to hear of something terrible that she had done, something that would be capable of keeping us at arms-length until I was cured, so that we might then be able to be reconciled, to refashion in a different and more supple form the chain that bound us. In the meantime, I was employing a thousand circumstances, a thousand pleasures to procure for her in my company the illusion of the happiness that I did not feel myself capable of giving her. I would have liked, as soon as I was cured, to set off for Venice, but how was I to manage it, if I married Albertine, I, who was so jealous of her that even in Paris whenever I decided to stir from my room it was to go out with her? Even when I stayed in the house all

afternoon, my thoughts accompanied her on her drive, traced a remote, blue horizon, created around the center that was myself a fluctuating zone of vague uncertainty. "How completely," I said to myself, "would Albertine spare me the anguish of separation if, in the course of one of these drives, seeing that I no longer said anything to her about marriage, she decided not to come back, and went off to her aunt's, without my having to bid her goodbye!" My heart, now that its scar had begun to heal, was ceasing to adhere to the heart of my mistress; I could by imagination shift her, separate her from myself without pain. No doubt, failing myself, some other man would be her husband, and being free, she would perhaps have some of those adventures that filled me with horror. But the day was so fine, I was so certain that she would return in the evening, that even if the idea of possible misbehavior did enter my mind, I could, by an exercise of free will, imprison it in a part of my brain in which it had no more importance than would have had in my real life the vices of an imaginary person; bringing into play the supple hinges of my thought, I had, with an energy that I felt in my head to be at once physical and mental, as if it were a muscular movement and a spiritual impulse, broken away from the state of perpetual preoccupation in which I had until then been confined, and was beginning to move in a free atmosphere, in which the idea of sacrificing everything in order to prevent Albertine from marrying someone else and to put an obstacle in the way of her taste for women seemed as unreasonable in my own eyes as in those of a person who had never known her. However, jealousy is one of those intermittent maladies, the cause of which is capricious, imperative, always identical in the same patient, sometimes entirely different in another. There are asthmatic persons who can soothe their crises only by opening the windows, inhaling the full blast of the wind, the pure air of the mountains, others by taking refuge in the heart of the city, in a room heavy with smoke. Rare indeed is the jealous man whose jealousy does not allow certain derogations. One will consent to infidelity, provided that he is told of it, another provided that it is concealed from him, wherein they appear to be equally absurd, since if the latter is more literally deceived inasmuch as the truth is not disclosed to him, the other demands in that truth the aliment, the extension, the renewal of his sufferings.

What is more, these two inverse manias of jealousy extend often beyond words, whether they implore or reject confidences. We see a jealous lover who is jealous only of the men with whom his mistress has relations in his

absence, but allows her to give herself to another man, if it is done with his authorization, near at hand, and, if not actually before his eyes, at least under his roof. This case is not at all uncommon among elderly men who are in love with a young woman. Such a man feels the difficulty of winning her favor, sometimes his inability to satisfy her, and, rather than be betrayed, prefers to admit to his house, into an adjoining room, some man whom he considers incapable of giving her bad advice, but not incapable of giving her pleasure. With another man it is just the opposite; never allowing his mistress to go out by herself for a single minute in a town that he knows, he keeps her in a state of veritable bondage, but allows her to go for a month to a place that he does not know, where he cannot form any mental picture of what she may be doing. I had with regard to Albertine both these sorts of sedative mania. I would not have been jealous if she had enjoyed her pleasures near to me, with my encouragement, pleasures that I would have kept entirely under my surveillance, thereby sparing me any fear of mendacity; I might perhaps not have been jealous either if she had gone to a place so unfamiliar and remote that I could not imagine nor find any possibility of knowing, or be tempted to know, the manner of her life. In both cases, my uncertainty would have been suppressed by a knowledge or an ignorance equally complete.

The decline of day plunging me back by an act of memory into a cool atmosphere of long ago, I breathed it with the same delight with which Orpheus inhaled the subtle air, unknown upon this earth, of the Elysian Fields.²⁵ But already the day was ending, and I was overpowered by the desolation of evening. Looking mechanically at the clock to see how many hours must elapse before Albertine's return, I saw that I had still time to dress and go downstairs to ask my landlady, Mme de Guermantes, for details about various pretty articles of clothing that I was eager to procure for my mistress. Sometimes I met the duchess in the courtyard, going out for a walk, even if the weather was bad, in a closefitting hat and furs. I knew quite well that, to many intelligent people she was merely a lady like any other, the name Duchesse de Guermantes signifying nothing, now that there are no longer any sovereign duchies or principalities, but I had adopted a different point of view in my method of enjoying people and places. All the châteaux of the territories of which she was duchess, princess, viscountess, this lady in furs defying the weather seemed to me to be carrying them on her person, as a figure carved over the portal of a

church door holds in his hand the cathedral that he has built or the city that he has defended. But these châteaux, these forests, my mind's eye alone could discern them in the left hand of the lady in furs, whom the king called cousin. My bodily eyes distinguished in it only, on days when the sky was threatening, an umbrella with which the duchess was not afraid to arm herself. "One can never be certain, it is wiser, I may find myself far from home, with a cabman demanding a fare *beyond my means*." The words "too dear" and "beyond my means" kept recurring all the time in the duchess's conversation, as did also: "I am too poor,"—without its being possible to decide whether she spoke thus because she thought it amusing to say that she was poor, being so rich, or because she thought it refined, being so aristocratic, that is, in spite of her affecting a peasant's viewpoint, not to attach to riches the importance that people give them who are merely rich and nothing else, and who look down upon the poor. Perhaps it was, rather, a habit contracted at a time in her life when, already rich, but not rich enough to satisfy her needs, considering the expense of keeping up all those properties, she felt a certain shortage of money which she did not wish to appear to be concealing. The things about which we most often jest are generally, on the contrary, the things that trouble us, but which we do not wish to appear to be troubled by, and feel perhaps a secret hope of the further advantage that the person to whom we are talking, hearing us treat the matter as a joke, will conclude that it is not true.

But on most evenings, at this hour, I could count on finding the duchess at home, and I was glad about this, for it was more convenient for me to ask her in detail for the information that Albertine desired. And down I went almost without thinking how extraordinary it was that I should be calling upon that mysterious Mme de Guermantes of my boyhood, simply in order to make use of her for a practical purpose, as one makes use of the telephone, a supernatural instrument before whose miracles we used to stand amazed, and that we now employ without giving it a thought, to summon our tailor or to order ice cream.

Albertine delighted in any sort of finery. I could not deny myself the pleasure of giving her some new trifle every day. And whenever she had spoken to me with rapture of a scarf, a stole, a sunshade which, from the window or as they passed one another in the courtyard, her eyes that so quickly distinguished anything elegant, had seen around the neck, over the shoulders, in the hand of Mme de Guermantes, knowing how the girl's

naturally fastidious taste (refined still further by the lessons in elegance of attire that Elstir's conversation had been to her)²⁶ would not be at all satisfied by any mere substitute, even of a pretty thing, such as fills its place in the eyes of the common herd, but differs from it entirely, I went in secret to have the duchess explain to me where, how, from what model the article had been created that had taken Albertine's fancy, how I should set about to obtain one exactly similar, in what the maker's secret, the charm (what Albertine called the "chic," the "style") of his manner, the precise name—the beauty of the material being of importance also—and quality of the fabrics that I was to insist upon their using.

When I had mentioned to Albertine, on our return from Balbec, that the Duchesse de Guermantes lived opposite us, in the same hôtel,²⁷ she had assumed, on hearing the proud title and great name, that air more than indifferent, hostile, contemptuous, which is the sign of an impotent desire in proud and passionate natures. Splendid as Albertine's nature might be, the fine qualities that it contained were free to develop only amid those hindrances that are our personal tastes, or that lamentation for those of our tastes that we have been obliged to relinquish—in Albertine's case snobbishness—which is called antipathy. Albertine's antipathy to people in society occupied, for that matter, but a very small part in her nature, and appealed to me as an aspect of the revolutionary spirit—that is to say an embittered love of the nobility—engraved upon the obverse side of the French character to the one that displays the aristocratic manner of Mme de Guermantes. To this aristocratic manner Albertine, in view of the impossibility of her acquiring it, would perhaps not have given a thought, but remembering that Elstir had spoken to her of the duchess as the best dressed woman in Paris, her republican contempt for a duchess gave way in my mistress to a keen interest in a fashionable woman. She was always asking me to tell her about Mme de Guermantes and was glad that I should go to the duchess to obtain advice as to her own attire. No doubt I might have got this from Mme Swann and indeed I did once write to her with this intention. But Mme de Guermantes seemed to me to carry to an even higher level the art of dressing. If, on going down for a moment to call upon her, after making sure that she had not gone out and leaving word that I was to be told as soon as Albertine returned, I found the duchess swathed in the mist of a garment of gray crêpe de Chine, I accepted this aspect of her that I felt to be due to complex causes and to be quite unalterable, I let myself be

overpowered by the atmosphere that it exhaled, like that of certain late afternoons cushioned in pearly gray by a vaporous fog; if, on the other hand, her indoor gown was Chinese with red and yellow flames, I gazed at it as at a glowing sunset; these garments were not a casual decoration alterable at will, but a definite and poetical reality like that of the weather, or the light peculiar to a certain hour of the day.

Of all the outdoor and indoor gowns that Mme de Guermantes wore, those that seemed most to respond to a definite intention, to be endowed with a special significance, were the garments made by Fortuny from old Venetian models.²⁸ Is it their historical character, is it rather the fact that each one of them is unique that gives them so special a significance that the pose of the woman who is wearing one while she waits for you to appear or while she talks to you assumes an exceptional importance, as though the costume had been the fruit of a long deliberation and your conversation was detached from the current of everyday life like a scene in a novel? In the novels of Balzac,²⁹ we see his heroines purposely put on one or another dress on the day they are expecting some particular visitor.³⁰ The dresses of today have less character, always excepting the creations of Fortuny. There is no room for vagueness in the novelist's description, since the gown does really exist, and the merest sketches of it are as naturally preordained as are those of a work of art. Before putting on one or another of them, the woman has had to make a choice between two garments, not more or less alike but each one profoundly individual, and answering to its name.

But the dress did not prevent me from thinking of the woman. Indeed, Mme de Guermantes seemed to me at this time more attractive than in the days when I was still in love with her. Expecting less of her (whom I no longer went to visit for her own sake), it was almost with the ease and comfort of a man in a room by himself, with his feet on the andirons, that I listened to her as though I were reading a book written in the speech³¹ of long ago. My mind was sufficiently detached to enjoy in what she said that pure charm of the French language that we no longer find either in the speech or in the literature of the present day. I listened to her conversation as to a folk song deliciously and purely French; I understood why she had belittled Maeterlinck³² (whom for that matter she now admired, from a feminine weakness of intellect, influenced by those literary fashions whose rays spread slowly), as I understood why Mérimée³³ had derided

Baudelaire, Stendhal Balzac, Paul-Louis Courier Victor Hugo, and Meilhac Mallarmé. I understood that the critic had a far more restricted outlook than his victim, but also a purer vocabulary. That of Mme de Guermantes, almost as much as that of Saint-Loup's mother, was purified to an enchanting degree. It is not in the bloodless pastiches of the writers of today, who say: *au fait* (for "in reality"), *singulièrement* (for "in particular"), *étonné* (for "struck with amazement"), etc., etc., that we recapture the old speech and the true pronunciation of words, but in conversing with a Mme de Guermantes or a Françoise. I had learned from the latter, when I was five years old, that one did not say "the Tarn" but "the Tar"; not "Béarn" but "Béar." The effect of which was that at twenty, when I began to go into society, I had no need to be taught there that one ought not to say, like Mme Bontemps: "Madame de Béarn."³⁴

It would be untrue to pretend that of this rustic and quasi-peasant quality that survived in her the duchess was not fully conscious, indeed she applied a certain affectation in displaying it. But, on her part, this was not so much the false simplicity of a great lady playing the countrywoman or the pride of a duchess bent upon snubbing the rich ladies who express contempt for the peasants whom they do not know as the quasi-artistic preference of a woman who knows the charm of what belongs to her and is not going to spoil it with a coat of modern varnish. In the same way, everybody will remember at Dives a Norman innkeeper, landlord of the Guillaume le Conquéran³⁵, who carefully refrained—which is very rare—from giving his hostelry the modern comforts of a hotel, and, albeit a millionaire, retained the speech and the smock of a Norman peasant and allowed you to enter his kitchen and watch him prepare with his own hands, as in a farmhouse, a dinner that was nevertheless infinitely better and even more expensive than are the dinners in the most luxurious hotels.

All the local sap that survives in the old noble families is not enough, there must also be born of them a person intelligent enough not to despise it, not to efface it beneath a society veneer. Mme de Guermantes, unfortunately clever and Parisian, who, when I first knew her, retained nothing of her native soil but its accent, had at least, when she wished to describe her life as a girl, found for her speech one of those compromises (between what would have seemed too spontaneously provincial on the one hand or artificially literary on the other), one of those compromises that

form the attraction of George Sand's *La Petite Fadette*³⁶ or of certain legends preserved by Chateaubriand in his *Mémoires d'outretombe*.³⁷ My chief pleasure was in hearing her tell some anecdote that brought peasants into the picture with herself. The historic names, the old customs gave to these blendings of the château with the village a distinctly attractive savor. Having remained in contact with the lands over which it once ruled, a certain kind of aristocracy has remained regional, with the result that the simplest remark unrolls before our eyes a historical and geographical map of France.

If there was no affectation, no desire to fabricate a special language, then this manner of pronouncing words was a regular museum of French history displayed in conversation. "My great-uncle Fitt-jam" was not at all surprising, for we know that the Fitz-James family³⁸ are proud to boast that they are French *grand seigneurs*, and do not like to hear their name pronounced in the English fashion. One must, incidentally, admire the touching docility of the people who had previously supposed themselves obliged to pronounce certain names phonetically, and who, all of a sudden, after hearing the Duchesse de Guermantes pronounce them otherwise, adopted a pronunciation that they could never have guessed. Thus the duchess, who had had a great-grandfather in the retinue of the Comte de Chambord, liked to tease her husband for having turned Orléanist by proclaiming: "We old Frochedorf people . . ." The visitor, who had always imagined that he was correct in saying "Frohsdorf," switched at once and ever afterward might be heard saying "Frochedorf."³⁹

On one occasion when I asked Mme de Guermantes who an exquisite young man was whom she had introduced to me as her nephew but whose name I had failed to catch, I was none the wiser when from the back of her throat the duchess uttered in a very loud but quite inarticulate voice: "*C'est l' . . . i Eon . . . l . . . b . . . frère à Robert.*"⁴⁰ He claims that he has the same shape of skull as the ancient Gauls." Then I realized that she had said: "*C'est le petit Léon,*" and that this was the Prince de Léon, who was indeed Robert de Saint-Loup's brother-in-law. "I know nothing about his skull," she went on, "but the way he dresses, and I must say he does dress quite well, is not at all in the style of those parts. Once when I was staying at Josselin,⁴¹ with the Rohans, we all went over to one of the pilgrimages, where there were peasants from every part of Brittany. A great hulking

villager from Léon stood gaping open-mouthed at Robert's brother-in-law in his beige breeches. 'What are you staring at me like that for?' said Léon. 'I bet you don't know who I am?' The peasant admitted that he did not. 'Very well,' said Léon, 'I'm your prince.' 'Oh!' said the peasant, taking off his cap and apologizing. 'I thought you were an *Englische*.'" And if, taking this opportunity, I led Mme de Guermantes on to talk about the Rohans (with whom her own family had frequently intermarried), her conversation would become impregnated with a hint of the melancholy charm of the pardons,⁴² and (as that true poet Pampille would say) with "the sour savor of buckwheat pancakes cooked over a gorse fire."⁴³

Of the Marquis du Lau (whose sad decline we all know, when, himself deaf, he used to be taken to call on Mme H, who was blind), she would recall the less tragic years when, after the day's hunt, at Guermantes, he would change into slippers before taking tea with the King of England, to whom he did not find himself inferior, and with whom, as we see, he stood upon no ceremony.⁴⁴ She described all this so picturesquely that she seemed to invest him with the plumed musketeer hat of the somewhat vainglorious gentlemen of Périgord.⁴⁵

But even in the mere classification of different people, her care to distinguish and indicate their native provinces was in Mme de Guermantes, when she was her natural self, a great charm that a Parisian-born woman could never have acquired, and those simple names Anjou, Poitou, Périgord,⁴⁶ filled her conversation with pictorial landscapes.

To return to the pronunciation and vocabulary of Mme de Guermantes, it is in this aspect that the nobility shows itself truly conservative, with everything that the word implies at once somewhat puerile and somewhat perilous, stubborn in its resistance to evolution but interesting also to an artist. I wanted to know the original spelling of the name Jean. I learned it when I received a letter from a nephew of Mme de Villeparisis who signs himself—as he was christened—as he figures in *Gotha*,⁴⁷ Jehan de Villeparisis, with the same handsome, superfluous, heraldic *h* that we admire, illuminated in vermilion or ultramarine in a Book of Hours or in a stained-glass window.

Unfortunately, I never had time to prolong these visits indefinitely, for I was anxious, if possible, not to return home after my mistress. But it was only in driblets that I was able to obtain from Mme de Guermantes

information as to her garments that was of use in helping me to order garments similar in style, so far as it was possible for a young girl to wear them, for Albertine.

“For instance, Madame, that evening when you dined with Mme de Saint-Euverte, and then went on to the Princesse de Guermantes, you had a dress that was all red, with red shoes, you were marvelous, you reminded me of a sort of great blood-red blossom, a blazing ruby—now what was that dress called? Is it the sort of thing that a girl can wear?”⁴⁸

The duchess, imparting to her tired features the radiant expression that the Princesse des Laumes⁴⁹ used to assume when Swann, in years past, paid her compliments, looked, with tears of merriment in her eyes, quizzingly, questioningly, and delightedly at M. de Bréauté who was always there at that hour and who set beaming from behind his monocle a smile that seemed to pardon this outburst of intellectual amphigory⁵⁰ for the sake of the physical excitement of youth which seemed to him to lie beneath it. The duchess appeared to be saying: “What is the matter with him? He must be mad.” Then turning to me with a coaxing air: “I wasn’t aware that I looked like a blazing ruby or a blood-red blossom, but I do remember, as it happens, that I had on a red dress: it was red satin, which was being worn that season. Yes, a girl can wear that sort of thing at a pinch, but you told me that your friend never went out in the evening. That is a full evening dress, not a thing that she can put on to pay calls.”

What is extraordinary is that of the evening in question, which after all was not so very remote, Mme de Guermantes should remember nothing but what she had been wearing, and should have forgotten a certain incident which nevertheless, as we will see presently, ought to have mattered to her greatly. It seems that among men and women of action (and society people are men and women of action on a minute, a microscopic scale, but are nevertheless men and women of action), the mind, overburdened by the need of attending to what is going to happen in an hour’s time, confides only a very few things to memory. As often as not, for example, it was not with the object of hoodwinking his questioner and making himself appear not to have been mistaken that M. de Norpois, when you reminded him of the prophecies he had uttered with regard to an alliance with Germany of which nothing had ever come, would say: “You must be mistaken, I have no recollection of it whatever, it is not like me, for in that sort of conversation I

am always most laconic, and I would never have predicted the success of one of those *coups d'éclat* that are often nothing more than *coups de tête* and almost always degenerate into *coups de force*.⁵¹ It is beyond question that in the remote future a Franco-German *rapprochement* might come into being and would be highly profitable to both countries, nor would France have the worse of the bargain, I dare say, but I have never spoken of it because the fruit is not yet ripe, and if you wish to know my opinion, in asking our recent enemies to join with us in solemn wedlock, I consider that we would be setting out to meet a severe rebuff, and that the attempt could end only in disaster." In saying this, M. de Norpois was not being untruthful, he had simply forgotten. We quickly forget what we have not deeply considered, what has been dictated to us by the spirit of imitation, by the passions of our time. These change, and with them our memory undergoes alteration. Even more than diplomats, politicians are unable to remember the point of view that they adopted at a certain moment, and some of their palinodes are due less to a surfeit of ambition than to a lack of memory. As for society people, they remember very little.

Mme de Guermantes assured me that, at the soirée to which she had gone in a red gown, she did not remember Mme de Chaussepierre's being present, and that I must be mistaken. And yet, heaven knows, the Chaussepierres had been present enough in the minds of both duke and duchess since then! For the following reason. M. de Guermantes had been the senior vice president of the Jockey Club,⁵² when the president died. Certain members of the club who were not popular in society and whose sole pleasure was to blackball the men who did not invite them to their houses started a campaign against the Duc de Guermantes, who, certain of being elected, and relatively indifferent to the presidency, which was a small matter for a man in his social position, paid no attention. It was urged against him that the duchess was a Dreyfusard (the Dreyfus Affair had long been concluded, but twenty years later people were still talking about it, and so far only two years had elapsed),⁵³ and entertained the Rothschilds, that too much consideration had been shown of late to certain great international potentates like the Duc de Guermantes, who was half German. The campaign found fertile ground, clubs being always jealous of men who are in the public eye and detesting great fortunes. Chaussepierre's own fortune was not at all meager, but nobody could take offense at it; he never spent a

penny, the couple lived in a modest apartment, the wife went about dressed in black wool. A passionate music lover, she did indeed give little afternoon parties to which many more singers were invited than to the Guermantes'. But no one ever mentioned these parties, no refreshments were served, the husband did not put in an appearance even, and everything went off quite quietly in the obscurity of the rue de la Chaise.⁵⁴ At the Opéra, Mme de Chaussepierre passed unnoticed, always among people whose names recalled the most "die-hard" element of the intimate circle of Charles X,⁵⁵ but people who were self-effacing, unsocial. On the day of the election, to general surprise, obscurity triumphed over bedazzlement: Chaussepierre, the second vice president, was elected president of the Jockey, and the Duc de Guermantes was left sitting—that is to say, in the senior vice president's chair. Of course, being president of the Jockey means little or nothing to princes of the highest rank such as the Guermantes. But not to be president when it is your turn, to see preferred to you a Chaussepierre to whose wife, Oriane, two years earlier, had not merely refused to return her greeting but had taken offense that an unknown scarecrow like that should greet her, this the duke did find hard to endure. He pretended to be superior to this rebuff, asserting moreover that it was his long-standing friendship with Swann that was at the root of it. Actually, his anger never cooled. One curious thing was that nobody had ever before heard the Duc de Guermantes make use of the quite commonplace expression "out-and-out," but ever since the Jockey election, whenever anybody referred to the Dreyfus Affair, out would come "out-and-out." "Dreyfus Affair, Dreyfus Affair, that's soon said, and it's a misuse of the term. It is not a question of religion, it's out-and-out a political matter." Five years might go by without your hearing him say "out-and-out" again, if during that time nobody mentioned the Dreyfus Affair, but if, at the end of five years, the name Dreyfus cropped up, "out-and-out" would at once follow automatically. The duke could not, anyhow, bear to hear any mention of the Affair, "which has been responsible," he would say, "for so many misfortunes," although he was really conscious of one and one only: his own failure to become president of the Jockey.

And so on the afternoon in question, when I reminded Madame de Guermantes of the red gown that she had worn at her cousin's soirée, M. de Bréauté was none too well received when, determined to say something, by an association of ideas that remained obscure and that he did not illuminate, he began, twisting his tongue about between his pursed lips: "Speaking of

the Dreyfus Affair . . .” (why the Dreyfus Affair?—we were talking simply about a red dress, and certainly poor Bréauté, whose only desire was to make himself agreeable, can have had no malicious intention). But the mere name of Dreyfus made the Duc de Guermantes knit his Jupiterian brows. “I was told,” Bréauté went on, “a bon mot, damned clever, that was said by our friend Cartier” (we must inform the reader that this Cartier, Mme de Villefranche’s brother, was in no way related to the jeweler of that name!), “not that I’m in the least surprised, for he’s got plenty of wit to spare.”

“Oh!” broke in Oriane, “he can spare me his wit. I can’t tell you how much your friend Cartier has always *bored* me, and I have never been able to understand the boundless charm that Charles de La Trémoille and his wife seem to find in such a boring person, for I meet him there every time that I go to their house.”

“My dear Dutt-yess,” replied Bréauté, who had difficulty pronouncing the soft c, “I think you are very hard on Cartier. It is true that he has perhaps made himself rather too mutt-y at home at the La Trémoilles’, but after all he does provide Tyarles with a sort of—what shall I say?—a sort of faithful Achates,⁵⁶ which has become a very rare bird indeed in these days. Anyhow, this is the mot as it was told to me. Cartier appears to have said that if M. Zola had gone out of his way to stand his trial and to be convicted, it was in order to enjoy the only sensation he had never yet tried, that of being in prison.”⁵⁷

“And so he ran away before they could arrest him,” Oriane broke in. “Your story doesn’t hold water. Besides, even if it was plausible, I think his remark absolutely idiotic. Is that what you call being witty!”

“Good grate-ious, my dear Oriane,” replied Bréauté who, finding himself contradicted, was beginning to lose confidence, “it’s not my mot, I’m telling you it as it was told to me, take it for what’s it worth. Anyhow, it earned M. Cartier a first-rate scolding from that excellent fellow La Trémoille who, and quite rightly, does not like people to discuss what one might call, so to speak, current events, in his drawing room, and was all the more annoyed because Mme Alphonse Rothschild was present. Cartier had to listen to a veritable tirade from La Trémoille.”

“I should think so,” said the duke, in the worst of tempers, “the Alphonse Rothschilds, even if they have the tact never to speak of that abominable affair, are Dreyfusards at heart, like all the Jews. Indeed, that is an argument

ad hominem”⁵⁸ (the duke was a trifle vague in his use of the expression *ad hominem*) “which is not sufficiently made use of to prove the dishonesty of the Jews. If a Frenchman robs or murders somebody, I do not consider myself bound, because he is a Frenchman like myself, to find him innocent. But the Jews will never admit that one of their fellow citizens is a traitor, although they know it perfectly well, and never think of the terrible repercussions” (the duke was thinking, naturally, of that accursed election of Chaussepierre) “which the crime of one of their people can bring even to . . . Come, Oriane, you’re not going to pretend that it isn’t damning to the Jews that they all support a traitor. You’re not going to tell me that it isn’t because they’re Jews.”

“Indeed, I am,” retorted Oriane (feeling, with a trace of irritation, a certain desire to hold her own against Jupiter Tonans⁵⁹ and also to put “intelligence” above the Dreyfus Affair). “Perhaps it is just because they are Jews and know their own race that they realize that a person can be a Jew and not necessarily a traitor and anti-French, as M. Drumont⁶⁰ seems to maintain. Certainly, if he’d been a Christian, the Jews wouldn’t have taken any interest in him, but they did so because they knew quite well that if he hadn’t been a Jew, people wouldn’t have been so ready to think him a traitor *a priori*, as my nephew Robert would say.”

“Women never understand a thing about politics,” exclaimed the duke, fastening his gaze upon the duchess. “That shocking crime is not simply a Jewish cause, but out-and-out an affair of vast national importance that may lead to the most appalling consequences for France, which ought to have driven out all the Jews, whereas I am sorry to say that the sanctions taken up to the present have been directed (in an ignoble fashion, which ought to be overruled) not against them, but against the most eminent of their adversaries, against men of the highest rank, who have been cast aside, to the ruin of our unhappy country.”

I felt that the conversation had taken a wrong turn and reverted hurriedly to the topic of clothes.

“Do you remember, Madame,” I said, “the first time that you were friendly to me?”

“The first time that I was friendly to him,” she repeated, turning with a smile to M. de Bréauté, the tip of whose nose grew more pointed, his smile

more tender out of politeness to Mme de Guermantes, while his voice, like a knife on the grindstone, emitted a few vague and rusty sounds.

“You were wearing a yellow gown with big black flowers.”

“But, my dear boy, that’s the same thing, those are evening dresses.”

“And your hat with the cornflowers that I liked so much! Still, those are all things of the past. I would like to order for the girl I mentioned to you a fur coat like the one you had on yesterday morning. Would it be possible for me to see it?”

“Of course; Hannibal has to be going in a moment. You can come to my room and my maid will show you everything. Only, my dear boy, though I will be delighted to lend you anything you like, I must warn you that if you have things from Callot’s or Doucet’s or Paquin’s⁶¹ copied by some small dressmaker, the result is never the same.”

“But I never dreamed of going to a small dressmaker, I know quite well it wouldn’t be the same thing, but I would be interested to hear you explain why.”

“You know quite well I can never explain anything, I am a perfect fool, I talk like a peasant. It is a question of handiwork, of style; as far as furs go, I can at least give you a note to my furrier, so that he won’t rob you. But you realize that even then it will cost you eight or nine thousand francs.”

“And that indoor gown that smells so bad, the one you were wearing the other evening, dark, fluffy, speckled, streaked with gold like a butterfly’s wing?”

“Ah! That’s a Fortuny gown.⁶² Your young lady can quite well wear that in the house. I have heaps of them; you will see them presently; in fact, I can give you one or two if you like. But I would like you to see one that my cousin Talleyrand has. I must write and ask her to lend it to me.”

“But you had such pretty shoes as well. Were they by Fortuny too?”⁶³

“No, I know the ones you mean, they are made of some gilded kid leather that we found in London, when I was shopping with Consuelo Manchester.⁶⁴ It was amazing. I could never understand how they did it, it was just like a golden skin, simply that, with a tiny diamond in front. The poor Duchess of Manchester is dead, but if you’d like me to, I can write and ask Lady Warwick or the Duchess of Marlborough to try and get me some more. I wonder, now, if I don’t still have a piece of that skin. You might be

able to have a pair made here. I will look for it this evening, and let you know.”

Since I endeavored as far as possible to leave the duchess before Albertine had returned, it often happened that I met in the courtyard as I came away from her door M. de Charlus and Morel on their way to take tea at Jupien’s, a supreme favor for the baron! I did not encounter them every day, but they went there every day. It is, moreover, to be observed that the regularity of a habit is generally in proportion to its absurdity. Remarkable things we do as a rule only by fits and starts. But insensate lives, in which the maniac deprives himself of all pleasure and inflicts the greatest discomforts upon himself, are those that alter least. Every ten years, if we had the curiosity to inquire, we would find the poor wretch still asleep at the hours when he might be living his life, going out at the hours when there is nothing to do but let oneself be murdered in the streets, sipping iced drinks when he is hot, still trying desperately to cure a cold. A slight burst of energy, for a single day, would be sufficient to change these habits once and for all. But the fact is that this sort of life is almost always the appanage of a person devoid of energy. Vices are another aspect of these monotonous existences that the exercise of willpower would suffice to render less painful. These two aspects might be observed simultaneously when M. de Charlus came every day with Morel to take tea at Jupien’s. A single outburst had marred this daily custom. The tailor’s niece having said one day to Morel: “That’s all right then, come tomorrow and I’ll treat you to a tea,” the baron had quite justifiably considered this expression very vulgar on the lips of a person whom he regarded as almost a prospective daughter-in-law, but as he enjoyed being offensive and became intoxicated by his own anger, instead of simply saying to Morel that he urged him to give her a lesson in refinement, the whole of their homeward walk was a succession of violent scenes. In the most insolent, the most arrogant tone: “So your ‘touch’ which, I can see, is not necessarily allied to ‘tact,’ has hindered the normal development of your sense of smell, since you could allow that fetid expression ‘treat us to a tea’—at fifteen centimes, I suppose—to waft its stench of sewage to my regal nostrils? When you have come to the end of a violin solo, have you ever seen yourself in my house rewarded with a fart, instead of frenzied applause, or a silence more eloquent still, since it is due to fear from being unable to restrain, not what your fiancée lavishes upon us, but the sob that you have brought to my lips?”

When a public official has had similar reproaches heaped upon him by his chief, he invariably loses his post next day. Nothing, on the contrary, could have been more painful to M. de Charlus than to dismiss Morel, and, fearing indeed that he had gone a little too far, he began to sing the girl's praises in minute detail, but with an abundance of good taste and unwittingly mingled with impertinence. "She is charming. Since you are a musician, I suppose that she seduced you by her voice, which is very beautiful in the high notes, where she seems to await the accompaniment of your B sharp. Her lower register appeals to me less, and that must bear some relation to the triple rise of her strange and slender throat, which when it seems to have come to an end begins again; but these are trivial details, it is her silhouette that I admire. And since she is a dressmaker and must be handy with her scissors, you must ask her to give me a pretty paper cut-out of herself."

Charlie had paid but little attention to this eulogy, the charms that it extolled in his betrothed having completely escaped his notice. But he said, in reply to M. de Charlus: "That's all right, my boy, I will tell her off properly, and she won't talk like that again." If Morel addressed M. de Charlus thus as his "boy," it was not that the handsome violinist was unaware that his own years numbered barely a third of the baron's. Nor did he use the expression as Jupien would have done, but with the simplicity that in certain relations postulates that a suppression of the difference in age has tacitly preceded affection. A feigned affection on Morel's part, in others, a sincere affection. Thus, about this time M. de Charlus received a letter worded as follows: "My dear Palamède, when am I going to see you again? I long for you terribly and think of you often. Ever yours, PIERRE." M. de Charlus racked his brains to discover which of his relatives it could be that took the liberty of addressing him so familiarly, and must consequently know him intimately, although he failed to recognize the handwriting. All the princes to whom the *Almanach de Gotha* accords a few lines passed in procession for days on end through his mind. And then, all of a sudden, an address written on the back of the letter enlightened him: the writer was the page at a gambling club to which M. de Charlus sometimes went. This page had not felt that he was being discourteous in writing in this tone to M. de Charlus, for whom on the contrary he felt the deepest respect. But he thought that it would not be civil not to address in the second person singular⁶⁵ a gentleman who had kissed you several times,

and thereby—he imagined in his naïveté—bestowed his affection on you. M. de Charlus was truly delighted by this familiarity. He even brought M. de Vaugoubert away from an afternoon party in order to show him the letter. And yet, heaven knows that M. de Charlus did not care to go about with M. de Vaugoubert. For the latter, his monocle in his eye, kept gazing in all directions at every passing youth. What was worse, emancipating himself when he was with M. de Charlus, he employed a form of speech that the baron detested. He gave feminine endings to all the men’s names and, being very stupid, imagined this pleasantry to be extremely witty, and was continually in fits of laughter. As at the same time he attached enormous importance to his position in the diplomatic service, these deplorable giggling outbursts in the street were perpetually interrupted by the fright caused him by the simultaneous appearance of some society person or, worse still, of a civil servant. “That little telegraph messenger,” he said, nudging the scowling baron with his elbow, “I used to know her, but she’s turned respectable, the wretch! Oh, that messenger boy from the Galeries Lafayette,⁶⁶ what a dream! Mon Dieu, there’s the head of the Commerce Department. I hope he didn’t notice anything. He’s quite capable of mentioning it to the minister, who would put me on the retired list, all the more as, it appears, he’s one himself.”⁶⁷ M. de Charlus was speechless with rage. At length, to bring this infuriating walk to an end, he decided to produce the letter and give it to the ambassador to read, but warned him to be discreet, for he liked to pretend that Charlie was jealous, in order to be able to make people think that he was enamored. “And,” he added with a priceless air of benevolence, “we ought always to try to cause as little trouble as possible.”

Before we come back to Jupien’s shop, the author would like to say how deeply he would regret it should any reader be offended by his portrayal of such strange characters. On the one hand (and this is the less important aspect of the matter), it may be felt that the aristocracy is, in these pages, disproportionately accused of degeneracy in comparison with the other classes of society. Were this true, it would be in no way surprising. The oldest families end by displaying, in a red and bulbous nose, or a deformed chin, characteristic signs in which everyone admires “blood.” But among these persistent and perpetually more pronounced features, there are others that are not visible, namely, tendencies and tastes.

It would be a more serious objection, were there any foundation for it, to say that all this is alien to us, and that we ought to extract truth from the poetry that is close at hand. Art extracted from the most familiar reality does indeed exist and its domain is perhaps the largest of any. But it is no less true that a strong interest, not to say beauty, may be found in actions inspired by a cast of mind so remote from anything that we feel, from anything that we believe, that we cannot ever succeed in understanding them, that they are displayed before our eyes like a spectacle without rhyme or reason. What could be more poetic than Xerxes, son of Darius, ordering the sea to be scourged with rods for having engulfed his fleet?⁶⁸

It is certain that Morel, relying on the influence that his personal attractions gave him over the girl, communicated to her, as coming from himself, the baron's criticism, for the expression "treat you to a tea" disappeared as completely from the tailor's shop as disappears from a drawing room some intimate friend who used to call daily, and with whom, for one reason or another, we have quarreled, or whom we are trying to keep out of sight and meet only outside the house. M. de Charlus was satisfied by the disappearance of "treat you to a tea." He saw in it a proof of his own ascendancy over Morel and the removal of its one little blemish from the girl's perfection. In short, like everyone of his kind, while genuinely fond of Morel and of the girl who was all but engaged to him, and an ardent advocate of their marriage, he thoroughly enjoyed his power to create at his pleasure more or less inoffensive little scenes, aloof from and above which he himself remained as Olympian as his brother.

Morel had told M. de Charlus that he was in love with Jupien's niece, and wished to marry her, and the baron liked to accompany his young friend on visits in which he played the part of father-in-law to be, indulgent and discreet. Nothing pleased him better.

My personal opinion is that "treat you to a tea" had originated with Morel himself, and that in the blindness of her love the young seamstress had adopted an expression from her beloved that clashed horribly with her own pretty way of speaking. This way of speaking, the charming manners that went with it, the patronage of M. de Charlus brought it about that many customers for whom she had worked received her as a friend, invited her to dinner, introduced her to their friends, though the girl accepted their invitations only with the baron's permission and on the evenings that suited him. "A young seamstress received in society?" the reader will exclaim,

“how improbable!” If you come to think of it, it was no less improbable that at one time Albertine should have come to see me at midnight, and that she should now be living with me. And yet this might perhaps have been improbable of anyone else, but not of Albertine, fatherless and motherless, leading so free a life that at first I had taken her, at Balbec, for the mistress of a racing cyclist,⁶⁹ a girl whose next of kin was Mme Bontemps, who in the old days, at Mme Swann’s, had admired nothing about her niece but her bad manners and who now shut her eyes, especially if by doing so she might be able to get rid of her by securing for her a wealthy marriage from which a little of the wealth would trickle into the aunt’s pocket (in the highest society, a mother who is very well born and quite penniless, when she has succeeded in finding a rich bride for her son, allows the young couple to support her, accepts presents of furs, an automobile, money from a daughter-in-law whom she does not like but whom she introduces to her friends).

The day may come when dressmakers—nor should I find it at all shocking—will move in society. Jupien’s niece being an exception affords us no base for calculation, for one swallow does not make a summer. In any case, if the very modest advancement of Jupien’s niece did scandalize some people, Morel was not among them, for, in certain respects, his stupidity was so great that not only did he label “rather a fool” this girl a thousand times cleverer than himself, and foolish only perhaps in her love for him, but he actually took to be adventuresses, dressmakers’ assistants in disguise playing at being ladies, the persons of rank and position who invited her to their houses and whose invitations she accepted without a trace of vanity. Naturally these were not Guermantes, nor even people who knew the Guermantes, but rich and elegant women of the middle class, broad-minded enough to feel that it is no disgrace to invite a dressmaker to your house and at the same time servile enough to derive some satisfaction from patronizing a girl whom His Highness the Baron de Charlus was in the habit—without any suggestion, of course, of impropriety—of visiting daily.

Nothing could have pleased the baron more than the idea of this marriage, for he felt that in this way Morel would not be taken from him. It appears that Jupien’s niece had been, when scarcely more than a child, “in trouble.” And M. de Charlus, while he sang her praises to Morel, would have had no hesitation in revealing this secret to his friend, who would be furious, and thus sowing the seeds of discord. For M. de Charlus, although

terribly malicious, resembled a great many good people who sing the praises of some man or woman, as a proof of their own generosity, but would avoid like poison the soothing words, so rarely uttered, that would be capable of putting an end to strife. Notwithstanding this, the baron refrained from making any insinuation, and for two reasons. "If I tell him," he said to himself, "that his fiancée is not spotless, his vanity will be hurt, he will be angry with me. Besides, how am I to know that he is not in love with her? If I say nothing, this flash in the pan will soon die out, I will be able to control their relations as I choose, he will love her only to the extent that I will allow. If I tell him of his betrothed's past transgression, who knows that my Charlie is not still sufficiently enamored of her to become jealous? Then I will by my own doing be converting a harmless and easily controlled flirtation into a serious passion, which is a difficult thing to manage." For these reasons, M. de Charlus preserved a silence that had only the outward appearance of discretion, but was in another respect meritorious, since it is almost impossible for men of his sort to hold their tongues.

Moreover, the girl herself was delightful, and M. de Charlus, who found that she satisfied all the esthetic interest that he was capable of feeling in women, would have liked to have hundreds of photographs of her. Not such a fool as Morel, he was pleased to hear the names of the ladies who invited her to their houses, and whom his social instinct was able to place, but he took care (as he wished to retain his power) not to mention this to Charlie who, a regular idiot in this respect, continued to believe that, apart from the "violin class" and the Verdurins, there existed only the Guermantes, and the few almost royal families enumerated by the baron, all the rest being but "dregs" or "scum." Charlie interpreted these expressions of M. de Charlus literally.

Why is it that M. de Charlus, awaited in vain every day of the year by so many ambassadors and duchesses, not dining with the Prince de Croy because one must give precedence to the latter, M. de Charlus spent all the time that he denied to these great ladies and grand seigneurs with a tailor's niece? First of all, the primary reason: Morel was there. Had he not been there, I find it very unlikely that Charlus would have behaved thus, or else you are judging matters as one of Aimé's busboys would have. Waiters are nearly the only ones who believe that an excessively rich man always wears new and stylish clothes and that a superbly chic gentleman gives dinner parties for sixty and goes about in an automobile. They are mistaken. Often

an excessively rich man always wears the same frayed coat while a superbly chic gentleman is one who hangs out only with the employees and, having returned home, plays cards with the valets. This does not prevent him from refusing to give precedence to Prince Murat.⁷⁰

Among the reasons that made M. de Charlus look forward to the marriage of the young couple was this, that Jupien's niece would then be in a sense an extension of Morel's personality, and so of the baron's power over and knowledge of him. As for "betraying" in the conjugal sense the violinist's future wife, it would never for a moment have occurred to M. de Charlus to feel the slightest scruple about that. But to have a "young couple" to guide, to feel himself the redoubtable and all-powerful protector of Morel's wife, who, if she regarded the baron as a god, would thereby prove that Morel had inculcated this idea into her, and would thus contain in herself something of Morel, would add a new variety to the form of M. de Charlus's domination and engender in his "creature," Morel, another being—the husband, that is to say would give the baron something different, new, curious, to love in him. Perhaps even this domination would be stronger now than it had ever been. For whereas Morel by himself, naked so to speak, often resisted the baron, whom he felt certain of winning back, once he was married, he would quickly fear for his household, his apartment, his future, would offer to M. de Charlus's desires a wider surface, an easier hold. All this, and even, for lack of anything else, on evenings when Charlus was bored, the prospect of stirring up trouble between husband and wife (the baron had never objected to battle scene paintings) was pleasing to him. Less pleasing, however, than the thought of the state of dependence upon himself in which the young couple would live. M. de Charlus's love for Morel acquired a delicious novelty when he said to himself: "His wife too will be mine just as much as he is, they will always take care not to annoy me, they will obey my caprices, and thus she will be a sign (unknown to me till now) of what I had almost forgotten, what is so very dear to my heart, that to all the world, to everyone who sees that I protect them and house them, to myself, Morel is mine." This testimony in the eyes of the world and in his own pleased M. de Charlus more than anything. For the possession of what we love is an even greater joy than love itself. Very often those who conceal this possession from the world do so only from the fear that the beloved object may be taken from them. And their happiness is diminished by this prudent reticence.

The reader may remember that Morel had once told the baron that his great ambition was to seduce some young girl, and this girl in particular, that to succeed in his enterprise he would promise to marry her, and, the rape accomplished, would “take off for parts unknown”;⁷¹ but this confession, what with the declarations of love for Jupien’s niece that Morel had come and poured out to him, M. de Charlus had forgotten. What was more, Morel had quite possibly forgotten it himself. There was perhaps a real gap between Morel’s nature—as he had cynically admitted it to be, perhaps even artfully exaggerated it—and the moment at which it would regain control of him. As he became better acquainted with the girl, she had appealed to him, he began to like her. He knew himself so little that he doubtless imagined that he was in love with her, perhaps indeed that he would be in love with her always. To be sure his initial desire, his criminal intention remained, but hidden beneath so many superimposed sentiments that there is nothing to show that the violinist would not have been sincere in saying that this vicious desire was not the true motive of his action. There was, moreover, a brief period during which, without his actually admitting it to himself, this marriage appeared to him to be necessary. Morel was suffering at the time from violent cramps in the hand and found himself obliged to contemplate the possibility of his having to give up the violin. Since, in everything but his art, he was astonishingly lazy, the necessity of finding someone to support him became urgent, and he preferred that it should be Jupien’s niece rather than M. de Charlus, this arrangement offering him greater freedom and also a wider choice of different kinds of women, ranging from the apprentices, perpetually changing, whom he would make Jupien’s niece debauch for him, to the rich and beautiful ladies to whom he would prostitute her. That his future wife might refuse to lend herself to these arrangements, that she could be stubborn to that point, never entered Morel’s calculations for a moment. However, they passed into the background, their place being taken by pure love, now that his cramps had ceased. His violin would suffice, together with his allowance from M. de Charlus, whose demands upon him would certainly be reduced once he, Morel, was married to the girl. Marriage was the urgent thing, because of his love, and in the interest of his freedom. He asked Jupien for his niece’s hand, and Jupien consulted her. This was wholly unnecessary. The girl’s passion for the violinist streamed around about her, like her hair when she let it down, like the joy in her beaming eyes. In Morel, almost everything

that was agreeable or advantageous to him awakened moral emotions and words to correspond, sometimes even melting him to tears. It was therefore sincerely—if such a word can be applied to him—that he addressed to Jupien's niece speeches as steeped in sentimentality (sentimental too are the speeches that so many young noblemen who look forward to a life of complete idleness address to some charming daughter of an extremely wealthy bourgeois) as had been steeped in unvarnished vileness the speech he had made to M. de Charlus about the seduction and deflowering of a virgin. But there was another side to this virtuous enthusiasm for a person who afforded him pleasure and the solemn engagements that he made with her. As soon as the person ceased to afford him pleasure, or indeed if, for example, the obligation to fulfil the promises that he had made caused him displeasure, she at once became the object of an antipathy that he justified in his own eyes and that, after some neurasthenic disturbance, enabled him to prove to himself, as soon as the balance of his nervous system was restored, that he was, even looking at the matter from a purely virtuous point of view, released from any obligation.

Thus, toward the end of his stay at Balbec, he had managed somehow to lose all his money and, not daring to mention the matter to M. de Charlus, looked about for someone to whom he might appeal. He had learned from his father (who at the same time had forbidden him ever to become a "sponger") that in such circumstances the correct thing is to write to the person whom you intend to ask for a loan, that you have "to speak to him about a business matter," to "ask him for a business appointment." This magic formula had so enchanted Morel that he would, I believe, have been glad to lose his money, simply to have the pleasure of asking for an appointment "about a business matter." In the course of his life he had found that the formula did not have quite the magic that he supposed. He had discovered that certain people, to whom otherwise he would never have written at all, did not reply within five minutes of receiving his letter asking to speak to them to "talk business." If the afternoon went by without Morel's receiving an answer, it never occurred to him that, even on the most optimistic assumption, it was quite possible that the gentleman addressed had not yet come home, or had had other letters to write, if indeed he had not gone away, fallen ill, etc. If by an extraordinary stroke of luck, Morel was given an appointment for the following morning, he would accost his intended creditor with: "I was quite surprised not to get an answer, I was

wondering if there was anything wrong, so I'm glad to see you're quite well," etc. Thus, at Balbec, and without telling me that he wished to talk "business" with him, he had asked me to introduce him to that very Bloch to whom he had been so unpleasant a week earlier in the train. Bloch had not hesitated to lend him—or rather to secure a loan for him, from M. Nissim Bernard,⁷² of five thousand francs. From that moment Morel had worshiped Bloch. He asked himself with tears in his eyes how he could show his gratitude to a person who had saved his life. Finally, I undertook to ask on Morel's behalf for a thousand francs monthly from M. de Charlus, a sum that he would at once forward to Bloch who would thus find himself repaid within quite a short time. The first month, Morel, still under the spell of Bloch's generosity, sent him the thousand francs immediately, but after this he doubtless found that a different application of the remaining four thousand francs might be more satisfactory to himself, for he began to say all sorts of unpleasant things about Bloch. The mere sight of Bloch was enough to fill his mind with dark thoughts, and Bloch himself having forgotten the exact amount that he had lent Morel, and having asked him for 3,500 francs instead of 4,000 which would have left the violinist 500 francs to the good, the latter took the line that, in view of so preposterous a fraud, not only would he not pay another centime, but his creditor might think himself very fortunate if Morel did not sue him for slander. As he said this his eyes blazed. He did not content himself, moreover, with asserting that Bloch and M. Nissim Bernard had no cause to hold a grudge against him but was soon saying that they might consider themselves lucky that he held none against them. Finally, M. Nissim Bernard having apparently stated that Thibaud⁷³ played as well as Morel, the latter decided that he ought to take the matter to court, such a remark being calculated to damage him in his profession, then, as there was no longer any justice in France, especially against the Jews (anti-Semitism being in Morel the natural effect of a loan of 5,000 francs from a Jew), M. Bernard took to never going out without a loaded revolver. A similar nervous reaction, in the wake of keen affection, was soon to occur in Morel with regard to the tailor's niece. It is true that M. de Charlus may have been unconsciously responsible, to some extent, for this change, for he was in the habit of saying, without meaning what he said for an instant, and merely to tease them, that, once they were married, he would never set eyes on them again but would leave them to fend for themselves. This idea was, in itself, quite insufficient to detach Morel from

the girl; but, lurking in his mind, it was ready when the time came to combine with other analogous ideas, capable, once the compound was formed, of becoming a powerful disruptive agent.

It was not very often, however, that I happened to meet M. de Charlus and Morel. Often they had already entered Jupien's shop when I left the duchess, for the pleasure that I found in her society was such that I was led to forget not merely the anxious expectation that preceded Albertine's return, but even the hour of that return. I will set apart from the other days on which I lingered at Mme de Guermantes's one that was marked by a trivial incident the cruel significance of which entirely escaped me and did not enter my mind until long afterward. On that late afternoon, Mme de Guermantes had given me, knowing that I was fond of them, some branches of syringa that had been sent to her from the Midi.⁷⁴ When I left the duchess and went upstairs to our apartment, Albertine had already returned, and on the staircase I ran into Andrée, who seemed to be distressed by the powerful odor of the flowers that I was bringing home.

"What, are you back already?" I said.

"Only a moment ago, but Albertine had letters to write, so she sent me away."

"You don't think she's up to any mischief?"

"Not at all, she's writing to her aunt, I think. But you know how she dislikes strong odors, she won't be particularly pleased to see those syringas."

"How stupid of me! I will tell Françoise to put them out on the service stair."

"Do you imagine Albertine won't notice the scent of them on you? Next to tuberose they have perhaps the strongest scent of any flower. Anyhow, I believe Françoise has gone out shopping."

"But then, since I don't have my latchkey today, how am I to get in?"

"Oh, you have only to ring the bell. Albertine will let you in. And, besides, Françoise may have come back by that time."

I said goodbye to Andrée. I had no sooner pressed the bell than Albertine came to open the door, which required some doing, as Françoise had gone out and Albertine did not know where to turn on the light. At length she was able to let me in, but the syringas put her to flight. I took them to the kitchen, with the result that my mistress, leaving her letter unfinished (why, I did not understand), had time to go to my room, from where she called to

me, and to lie down on my bed. Once again, at the actual moment, I saw nothing in all this that was not perfectly natural, at the most a little confusing, but, in any case, unimportant. She had nearly been caught with Andrée and had snatched a brief respite for herself by turning out all the lights, going to my room so that I would not see the disordered state of her own bed, and pretending to be busy writing a letter. But we will see all this later on, a situation the truth of which I never ascertained.

In general, and apart from this isolated incident, everything was quite normal when I returned from my visit to the duchess. Since Albertine never knew whether I might not wish to go out with her before dinner, I usually found in the hall her hat, coat, and umbrella, which she had left lying there in case they should be needed. As soon as, on opening the door, I caught sight of them, the atmosphere of the house became breathable once more. I felt that, instead of a rarefied air, it was happiness that filled it. I was rescued from my melancholy, the sight of these trifles gave me possession of Albertine, and I would run to greet her.

On the days when I did not go down to Mme de Guermantes, to pass the time somehow, during the hour that preceded the return of my mistress, I would take up an album of Elstir's work, one of Bergotte's books, or Vinteuil's sonata.

Then, just as those works of art that seem to address themselves to the eye or ear alone require that, if we are to enjoy them, our awakened intelligence will collaborate closely with those two senses, I would unconsciously call forth from within me the dreams that Albertine had inspired in me long ago, before I knew her, dreams that had been stifled by the routine of everyday life. I cast them into the musician's phrase or the painter's image as into a crucible or used them to enrich the book that I was reading. And no doubt the book appeared all the more vivid in consequence. But Albertine herself gained just as much by being thus transported out of one of the two worlds to which we have access, and in which we can place alternately the same object, by escaping thus from the crushing weight of matter to play freely in the fluid spaces of the mind. I found myself suddenly and for the instant capable of feeling an ardent desire for this tiresome girl. She had at that moment the appearance of a work by Elstir or Bergotte, I felt a momentary passion for her, seeing her in the perspective of imagination and art.

Presently someone would come to tell me that she had returned; though there was a standing order that her name was not to be mentioned if I was not alone, if for instance I had in the room with me Bloch, whom I would compel to remain with me a little longer so that there should be no risk of his meeting my mistress in the hall. For I concealed the fact that she was staying in the house, and even that I ever saw her there, so afraid was I that one of my friends might become infatuated with her, and wait for her outside, or that in a momentary encounter in the hall or the anteroom she might make a signal and fix a rendezvous. Then I would hear the rustle of Albertine's skirt on her way to her own room, for out of discretion and also no doubt in that spirit in which, when we used to go to dinner at La Raspelière, she took care that I should have no cause for jealousy, she did not come to my room, knowing that I was not alone. But it was not only for this reason, as I suddenly realized. I remembered; I had known a different Albertine, then all at once she had changed into another, the Albertine of today. And for this change I could hold no one responsible but myself. The admissions that she would have made to me, easily at first, then deliberately, when we were simply good friends, had ceased to flow from her as soon as she had suspected that I was in love with her, or, without perhaps naming Love, had divined the existence in me of an inquisitorial sentiment that desires to know, is pained by the knowledge, and seeks to learn still more. Ever since that day, she had concealed everything from me. She kept away from my room if she thought that my companion was (rarely as this happened) not male but female, she whose eyes used at one time to sparkle so brightly whenever I mentioned a girl: "You must try and get her to come here. It would be amusing to meet her."

"But she has what you call a bad reputation."

"Precisely, that will make it all the more fun."

At that moment, I might perhaps have learned all that there was to know. And even when in the little casino she had withdrawn her breast from Andrée's, I believe that this was due not to my presence but to that of Cottard, who was capable, she doubtless thought, of giving her a bad reputation.⁷⁵ And yet, even then, she had already begun to "stiffen," confiding words no longer issued from her lips, her gestures became reserved. After this, she had stripped herself of everything that might stir my emotions. To those parts of her life of which I knew nothing she ascribed a character the inoffensiveness of which my ignorance made itself

her accomplice in accentuating. And now, the transformation was completed, she went straight to her room if I was not alone, not merely from fear of disturbing me, but in order to show me that she did not care who was with me. There was one thing alone that she would never again do for me, which she would have done only in the days when it would have left me indifferent, which she would then have done without hesitation for that very reason, namely, confess. I would always be reduced, like a judge, to draw uncertain conclusions from imprudent words that were perhaps explicable without postulating culpability. And always she would feel that I was jealous and judging her.

Our engagement was acquiring the allure of a trial and giving her the timidity of someone who is guilty. Now she changed the subject when it involved other people, men or women, unless they were elderly. It was when she did not yet suspect that I was jealous of her that I should have asked her anything I wanted to know. One should always take advantage of such a time. It is then that our mistress tells us what her pleasures are and even the means that help her to hide them from others. She would no longer have admitted to me now as she had at Balbec, partly because it was true, partly to excuse herself for not having shown more freely her affection for me, because she already found me tiresome even then and she had seen by my kindness to her that she did not need to show as much to me as to others in order to obtain more from me than from them; she would not have admitted to me now as she had then: "I think it stupid to let people see whom you love, it's just the opposite with me, as soon as I like a person, I pretend to pay no attention. That way no one knows anything." What! This was the same Albertine of today, with her pretensions to be frank and indifferent to everyone, who had told me that! She would never state that rule to me now. When chatting with me, she contented herself with applying it by saying of this person or other who might alarm me: "Oh, I don't know. I didn't look at her. She's too uninteresting." And from time to time, to anticipate things that I might learn, she made one of those avowals whose tone, before one knows the reality that they are meant to distort, to prove innocent, reveals as being lies.

As I listened to Albertine's footsteps with the consoling pleasure of thinking that she would not be going out again that evening, I thought how wonderful it was that for this girl, whom at one time I had supposed that I could never possibly succeed in knowing, the act of returning home every

day was nothing else than that of entering my home. The pleasure, a blend of mystery and sensuality, which I had felt, fugitive and fragmentary, at Balbec, on the night when she had come to sleep at the hotel, was completed, stabilized, filled my dwelling, hitherto void, with a permanent store of domestic, almost conjugal bliss (radiating even into the hallways) upon which all my senses, either actively, or, when I was alone, in imagination as I waited for her to return, peacefully fed. When I had heard the door of Albertine's room shut behind her, if I had a friend with me, I made haste to get rid of him, not leaving him until I was quite sure that he was on the staircase, down which I might even escort him for a few steps.

In the hall, Albertine was coming toward me. "I say, while I'm taking off my things, I will send you Andrée, she's come up for a minute to say hello." And still swathed in the big gray veil, falling from her chinchilla toque, which I had given her at Balbec, she turned from me and went back to her room, as though she had guessed that Andrée, whom I had charged with the duty of watching over her, would presently, by relating their day's adventures in full detail, mentioning their meeting with some person of their acquaintance, impart a certain clarity of outline to the vague regions in which that excursion had been made, which had taken the whole day and which I had been incapable of imagining.

Andrée's defects had become more accentuated; she was no longer as pleasant a companion as when I first knew her. One noticed now, on the surface, a sort of bitter uneasiness, ready to gather like a "squall" on the sea, merely if I happened to mention something that Albertine and I enjoyed. This did not prevent Andrée from being kinder to me, liking me better—and I have had frequent proof of this—than other more amiable people. But the slightest look of happiness on a person's face, if it was not caused by herself, gave a shock to her nerves, as unpleasant as that given by a banging door. She could bear the sufferings in which she had no part, but not the pleasures; if she saw that I was unwell, she was distressed, was sorry for me, would have stayed to nurse me. But if I displayed a satisfaction as trifling as that of stretching myself with a blissful expression as I closed a book, saying: "Ah! I've spent a really happy afternoon with this entertaining book," these words, which would have pleased my mother, Albertine, Saint-Loup, provoked in Andrée a sort of disapprobation, perhaps simply a sort of nervous malaise. My satisfactions caused her an annoyance that she was unable to conceal. These defects were

supplemented by others of a more serious nature; one day when I mentioned that young man⁷⁶ so learned in matters of racing and golf, so uneducated in all other respects, whom I had met with the little band at Balbec, Andrée said with a sneer: “You know that his father is a swindler, he only just missed being prosecuted. They’re swaggering now more than ever, but I tell everybody about it. I would love for them to sue me for slander. What a fine deposition I would give!” Her eyes sparkled. In fact, I discovered that the father had done nothing wrong, and that Andrée knew this as well as anybody. But she had believed that the son scorned her, had sought something that would embarrass him, put him to shame, had invented a long story of depositions that she imagined herself called upon to give in court, and, by dint of repeating the details to herself, was perhaps no longer aware that they were not true.

And so, in her present state (and even without her fleeting, foolish hatreds), I would not have wished to see her, were it merely on account of the malicious susceptibility that encircled with a harsh and frigid bond her warmer and better nature. But the information that she alone could give me about my mistress was of too great interest for me to be able to neglect so rare an opportunity of acquiring it. Andrée came into my room, shutting the door behind her; they had met a girl they knew, whom Albertine had never mentioned to me.

“What did they talk about?”

“I can’t tell you; I took the opportunity, since Albertine wasn’t alone, to go and buy some wool.”

“Buy some wool?”

“Yes, it was Albertine who asked me to get it.”

“All the more reason not to have gone, it was perhaps intended to get you out of the way.”

“But she asked me to go for it before we met her friend.”

“Ah!” I replied, drawing breath again. At once my suspicion revived; she might, for all I knew, have made a rendezvous beforehand with her friend and have provided herself with an excuse to be left alone when the time came. Besides, could I be certain that it was not my former hypothesis (according to which Andrée did not always tell me the truth) that was correct? Andrée was perhaps conniving with Albertine. Love, I used to say to myself, at Balbec, is what we feel for a person whose actions seem rather to arouse our jealousy; we feel that if she were to tell us everything, we

might perhaps easily be cured of our love for her. However skillfully jealousy is concealed by him who suffers from it, it is very quickly detected by her who has inspired it, and who when the time comes is no less skillful. She seeks to lead us off the track of what might make us unhappy, and succeeds, for, to the man who is not forewarned, how should a casual remark reveal the falsehoods that lie beneath it? We do not distinguish this remark from the rest; spoken in terror, we hear it without really paying attention. Later on, when we are alone, we will return to this remark, it will seem to us not altogether to match the reality of the situation. But do we remember the remark correctly? It seems as though there arose spontaneously in us, with regard to it and to the accuracy of our memory, an uncertainty of the sort which, in certain nervous disorders, makes us unable to remember whether we have bolted the door, no better after the fiftieth time than after the first, it would seem that we can repeat the action indefinitely without its ever being accompanied by a precise and liberating memory. But at least we can shut the door again for the fifty-first time. Whereas the disturbing remark exists in the past in an imperfect hearing of it which it does not lie in our power to repeat. Then we concentrate our attention on other remarks that conceal nothing, and the sole remedy that we do not seek is to be ignorant of everything in order not to have any desire to know more. As soon as jealousy is discovered, it is regarded by her who is its object as a challenge that authorizes deception. Moreover, in our endeavor to learn something, it is we who have taken the initiative in lying and deceit. Andrée, Aimé may promise us that they will say nothing, but will they keep their promise? Bloch could promise nothing because he knew nothing, and Albertine has only to talk to any of the three in order to learn, with the help of what Saint-Loup would have called "cross-checking," that we are lying to her when we claim to be indifferent to her actions and morally incapable of having her watched. And so, following thus upon my habitual boundless uncertainty as to what Albertine might be doing, an uncertainty too indeterminate not to remain painless, which was to jealousy what that incipient forgetfulness in which relief is born of vagueness is to grief, the little fragment of an answer that Andrée had brought me at once began to raise new questions; I had succeeded only, by exploring one portion of the great zone that extended around me, in making withdraw further from me that unknowable thing, which, when we seek to form a definite idea of it, another person's life invariably is to us. I

continued to question Andrée, while Albertine, from discretion and in order to leave me free (was she conscious of this?) to question the other, prolonged her toilette in her own room.

“I think that Albertine’s uncle and aunt both like me,” I impetuously said to Andrée, forgetting her peculiar nature. At once I saw her glutinous features change, like a syrup that has turned, her face seemed permanently clouded. Her mouth became bitter. Nothing remained in Andrée of that juvenile gaiety that, like all the little band and notwithstanding her feeble health, she had displayed in the year of my first visit to Balbec and which now (it is true that Andrée was now several years older) was so speedily eclipsed in her. But I was to make it reappear involuntarily before Andrée left me that evening to go home to dinner. “Somebody was singing your praises to me today in the most glowing terms,” I said to her. Immediately a ray of joy beamed from her eyes, she looked as though she really loved me. She avoided my gaze but smiled at the empty air with a pair of eyes that suddenly became quite round. “Who was it?” she asked with an artless, avid interest. I told her, and whoever it was, she was delighted.

Then the time came for us to part, and she left me. Albertine came to my room; she had undressed and was wearing one of the pretty crêpe de Chine peignoirs, or one of the Japanese kimonos that I had asked Mme de Guermantes to describe to me, and for some of which supplementary details had been furnished me by Mme Swann, in a letter that began: “After your long eclipse, I felt, as I read your letter about my *tea gowns*,^{ZZ} that I was receiving a message from a ghost.” Albertine was wearing a pair of black shoes studded with brilliants, which Françoise indignantly called clogs, like those that, from the drawing room window, she had seen Mme de Guermantes wearing in the evening, just as a little later Albertine took to wearing slippers, some of gilded kid, others of chinchilla, the sight of which was pleasant to me because they were all of them signs (which other shoes would not have been) that she was living with me. She had also certain things that had not come to her from me, including a beautiful gold ring. I admired upon it the outspread wings of an eagle. “My aunt gave it to me,” she explained. “She can be quite nice sometimes after all. It makes me feel old, because she gave it to me on my twentieth birthday.”

Albertine took a far keener interest in all these pretty things than the duchess, because, like every obstacle in the way of possession (in my own case the ill health that made travel so difficult and so desirable), poverty,

more generous than opulence, gives to women far more than the clothes that they cannot afford to buy: the desire for those clothes that is the genuine, detailed, profound knowledge of them. She, because she had never been able to afford these things, I, because in ordering them for her I was seeking to give her pleasure, we were both of us like students who already know all about the paintings that they are longing to go to Dresden or Vienna to see. Whereas rich women, amid the multitude of their hats and gowns, are like those tourists to whom the visit to a gallery, being preceded by no desire, gives merely a sensation of bewilderment, boredom, and exhaustion. A particular toque, a particular sable coat, a particular Doucet peignoir,⁷⁸ its sleeves lined in pink, assumed for Albertine, who had observed them, coveted them, and, thanks to the exclusiveness and the attention to detail that are elements of desire, had at once isolated them from everything else in a void against which the lining or the scarf stood out to perfection, and learned them by heart in every detail—and for myself who had gone to Mme de Guermantes in quest of an explanation of what constituted the particular merit, the superiority, the elegance of the item and the inimitable style of the great designer—an importance, a charm that they certainly did not possess for the duchess, surfeited before she had even acquired an appetite and would not, indeed, have possessed for me had I seen them a few years earlier while accompanying some lady of fashion on one of her wearisome tours of the dressmakers' shops. To be sure, a lady of fashion was what Albertine was gradually becoming. For, even if each of the things that I ordered for her was the prettiest of its kind, with all the refinements that had been added to it by Mme de Guermantes or Mme Swann, she was beginning to possess these things in abundance. But no matter, since she had admired them from the first, and each of them separately. When we have become enamored of one painter, then of another, we may end by feeling for the whole gallery an admiration that is not frigid, for it is made up of successive enthusiasms, each one exclusive in its day, which finally have joined forces and become reconciled in one whole.

She was not, for that matter, frivolous, read a great deal when she was by herself, and used to read aloud when she was with me. She had become extremely intelligent. She would say, though she was quite wrong in saying: "I am appalled when I think that but for you I would still be quite ignorant. Don't deny it. You have opened up a world of ideas to me that I never suspected, and whatever I may have become I owe entirely to you."

It will be remembered that she had spoken in similar terms of my influence over Andrée. Had either of them a real feeling for me? And, in themselves, what were Albertine and Andrée? To learn the answer, I would have to immobilize you, to cease to live in that perpetual expectation, ending always in a different presentment of you, I would have to cease to love you in order to see you clearly, to cease to know your interminable and ever disconcerting arrival, oh, girls, oh, recurrent ray in the swirling vortex wherein we throb with emotion upon seeing you reappear while barely recognizing you, in the vertiginous velocity of light. That velocity, we would perhaps remain unaware of it and everything would seem to us motionless, did not a sexual attraction set us in pursuit of you, drops of gold always dissimilar, and always surpassing our expectation. On each occasion a girl so little resembles what she was the time before (shattering in fragments as soon as we catch sight of her the memory that we had retained of her and the desire that we were proposing to gratify), that the stability of nature we ascribe to her is purely fictitious and a convenience of speech. We have been told that some beautiful girl is tender, loving, full of the most delicate sentiments. Our imagination accepts this assurance, and when we behold for the first time, within the woven girdle of her golden hair, the rosy disc of her face, we are almost afraid that this too virtuous sister may chill our ardor by her very virtue, that she can never be to us the lover for whom we have been longing. What secrets, at least, we confide in her from the first moment, on the strength of that nobility of heart, what plans we discuss together! But a few days later, we regret that we were so confiding, for the rosy-cheeked girl, at our second meeting, addresses us in the language of a lubricious Fury.⁷⁹ As for the successive faces, which after a pulsation lasting for some days, the renewal of the rosy light presents to us, it is not even certain that a *movimentum*⁸⁰ external to these girls has not modified their aspect, and this might well have happened with my band of girls at Balbec. People extol to us the gentleness, the purity of a virgin. But afterward they feel that something more piquant would please us better and recommend her to show more boldness. In herself was she one more than the other? Perhaps not, but capable of yielding to any number of different possibilities in the vertiginous current of life. With another girl, whose whole attraction lay in something implacable (which we counted upon subduing to our own will), as, for example, with the terrible jumping girl at

Balbec who grazed in her leaps the pates of startled old gentlemen,⁸¹ what a disappointment when, in the new aspect of her, just as we were addressing her in affectionate speeches stimulated by our memory of all her cruelty to others, we heard her, as her first move in the game, tell us that she was shy, that she could never say anything intelligent to anyone at a first introduction, so frightened is she, and that it was only after a couple of weeks or so that she would be able to talk to us at her ease! The steel had turned to cotton, there was nothing left for us to try to break, since of her own accord she had lost all her consistency. Of her own accord, but by our fault perhaps, for the tender words that we had addressed to Severity had perhaps, even without any deliberate calculation on her part, suggested to her that she ought to be gentle. (Distressing as the change may have been to us, it was not altogether maladroit, for our gratitude for all her gentleness would exact more from us perhaps than our delight at overcoming her cruelty.) I do not say that a day will not come when, even to these luminous girls, we will not assign sharply differentiated characters, but that will be because they have ceased to interest us, because their entry upon the scene will no longer be to our heart the apparition that it expected in a different form and that leaves it overwhelmed every time by new incarnations. Their immobility will come from our indifference to them, which will leave them to the judgment of our mind. The latter's conclusions will not, for that matter, be expressed in any more categorical terms, for after it has decided that some defect that was predominant in one is fortunately absent from the other, it will see that this defect had as its counterpart some priceless quality. So that from the false judgment of our intelligence, which comes into play only when we have ceased to take any interest, there will result defined, stable characters of girls, which will enlighten us no more than the surprising faces that used to appear every day when, in the exciting speed of our expectation, these girls presented themselves daily, weekly, too different to allow us, since they never paused in their passage, to classify them, to award degrees of merit. As for our sentiments, we have spoken of them too often to repeat again now, that as often as not love is nothing more than the association of the image of a girl (whom otherwise we would soon have found intolerable) with the heartbeats inseparable from an endless, vain expectation, and from her failure to appear at the expected time.⁸² All this is true not merely of imaginative young men brought into contact with changeable girls. At the stage that our narrative has now reached, it appears,

as I have since heard, that Jupien's niece had changed her opinion of Morel and M. de Charlus. My chauffeur, reinforcing the love that she felt for Morel, had extolled to her, as existing in the violinist, boundless refinements of delicacy in which she was all too ready to believe. And at the same time Morel never ceased to complain to her of the despotic treatment that he received from M. de Charlus, which she ascribed to malice, never imagining that it could be due to love. She was moreover forced to acknowledge that M. de Charlus was tyrannically present at all their meetings. In corroboration of all this, she had heard society women speak of the baron's atrocious malice. Now, quite recently, her judgment had been completely reversed. She had discovered in Morel (without ceasing for that reason to love him) depths of malice and perfidy, compensated it was true by frequent gentleness and genuine sensitivity, and in M. de Charlus an unsuspected and immense kindness blended with asperities, of which she knew nothing. And so she had been unable to arrive at any more definite judgment of what, each in himself, the violinist and his protector really were, than I was able to form of Andrée, whom nevertheless I saw every day, or of Albertine, who was living with me.

On the evenings when the latter did not read aloud to me, she would play some music or begin a game of checkers, or a conversation, any of which I would interrupt with kisses. The simplicity of our relations made them soothing. The very emptiness of her life gave Albertine a sort of eagerness to comply with the only requests that I made of her. Behind this girl, as behind the purple light that used to filter beneath the curtains of my room at Balbec, while outside the concert blared, were shining the blue-green undulations of the sea.⁸³ Was she not, after all (she in the depth of whose being there now ordinarily resided an idea of myself so familiar that, next to her aunt, I was perhaps the person whom she distinguished least from herself), the girl whom I had seen the first time at Balbec, in her flat polo cap, with her insistent laughing eyes, a stranger still, slender as a silhouette projected against the waves? These effigies preserved intact in our memory, when we recapture them, we are astonished at their dissimilarity from the person whom we know, and we realize what a task of remodeling is performed every day by habit. In the charm that Albertine had in Paris, by my fireside, there still survived the desire that had been aroused in me by that insolent and blossoming cortège along the beach, and just as Rachel retained in Saint-Loup's eyes, even after he had made her abandon it, the

prestige of her life on the stage, so in this Albertine cloistered in my house, far from Balbec, from where I had hurried her away, there persisted the excitement, the social confusion, the uneasy vanity, the roving desires of life by the seaside. She was so effectively caged that on certain evenings I did not even ask her to leave her room for mine, her whom at one time everyone pursued, whom I had found it so hard to overtake as she sped past on her bicycle, whom the liftboy himself was unable to bring back to me,⁸⁴ leaving me with little hope of her coming, although I sat up waiting for her all the night. Had not Albertine been—out there in front of the hotel—like a great actress of the blazing beach, arousing jealousy when she advanced upon that natural stage, not speaking to anyone, pushing past the habitués, dominating the girls, her friends, and was not this so greatly coveted actress the same who, withdrawn by me from the stage, shut up in my house, was sheltered now from the desires of all those who might hereafter seek for her in vain, sitting now in my room, now in her own, and engaged in drawing or cutting out some pattern?

No doubt, in the first days at Balbec, Albertine seemed to be on a parallel plane to that on which I was living, but one that had drawn closer (after my visit to Elstir) and had finally joined it, as my relations with her, at Balbec, in Paris, then at Balbec again, grew more intimate. Moreover, between the two pictures of Balbec, on my first visit and on my second, pictures composed of the same villas from which the same girls walked down to the same sea, what a difference! In Albertine's friends at the time of my second visit, whom I knew so well, whose good and bad qualities were so clearly engraved on their features, how was I to recapture those fresh, mysterious strangers who at first could not, without making my heart throb, thrust open the door of their chalet over the crunching sand and set the tamarisks shivering as they came down the path! Their big eyes had, in the interval, been absorbed into their faces, doubtless because they had ceased to be children, but also because those ravishing strangers, those actresses of the romantic first year, about whom I had gone ceaselessly in quest of information, no longer held any mystery for me. They had become obedient to my caprices, a mere grove of budding girls, from among whom I was distinctly proud of having plucked, and hidden from them all, the most beautiful rose.

Between the two Balbec settings, so different one from the other, there was the interval of several years in Paris, the long expanse of which was

dotted with all the visits that Albertine had paid me. I saw her in different years of my life occupying, with regard to myself, different positions, which made me feel the beauty of the interposed gaps, that long extent of time during which I had remained without seeing her and against the diaphanous background of which the rosy person that I saw before me was modeled with mysterious shadows and in bold relief. This was due also to the superimposition not merely of the successive images that Albertine had been for me, but also of the great qualities of intelligence and heart, the defects of character, all alike unsuspected by me, which Albertine, in a germination, a multiplication of herself,⁸⁵ a carnal efflorescence in somber colors, had added to a nature that formerly could scarcely have been said to exist, but was now difficult to plumb. For other people, even those of whom we have so often dreamed that they seem to us nothing more than an image, a figure by Benozzo Gozzoli⁸⁶ standing out against a greenish background, about whom we were prepared to believe that the only variations depended upon the point of view from which we looked at them, their distance from us, the effect of light and shade, these people, while they change in relation to ourselves, change also in themselves, and there had been an enrichment, a solidification, and an increase of volume in the figure once so simply outlined against the sea. Moreover, it was not only the sea at the close of day that came to life for me in Albertine, but sometimes the drowsy murmur of the sea upon the shore on moonlit nights. Sometimes, indeed, when I rose to fetch a book from my father's study and had given my mistress permission to lie down while I was out of the room, she was so tired after her long outing in the morning and afternoon in the open air that, even if I had been away for a moment only, when I returned I found Albertine asleep and did not wake her. Stretched out at full length upon my bed, in an attitude so natural that no art could have designed it, she reminded me of a long blossoming stem that had been laid there, and so indeed she was: the faculty of dreaming that I possessed only in her absence I recovered at such moments in her presence, as though by falling asleep she had become a plant. In this way her sleep did to a certain extent make love possible; alone, I was able to think of her, but I missed her, I did not possess her. When she was present, I spoke to her, but I was too far absent from myself to be able to think. When she was asleep, I no longer needed to talk to her, I knew that she was no longer looking at me, I had no longer any need to live on the surface of myself. By shutting her eyes, by losing

consciousness, Albertine had stripped off, one after another, the different human characters with which she had deceived me ever since the day when I had first made her acquaintance. She was animated now only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, more alien, and yet one that belonged more to me. Her personality did not escape at every moment, as when we were talking, by the channels of her unacknowledged thoughts and of her gaze. She had called back into herself everything of her that lay outside, she had taken refuge, had enclosed, reabsorbed herself in her body. In keeping her before my eyes, in my hands, I had that impression of possessing her entirely, which I never had when she was awake. Her life was submitted to me, exhaled toward me its gentle breath. I listened to this murmuring, mysterious emanation, soft as a sea breeze, enchanting as this moonlight that was her sleep. So long as it lasted, I was free to dream about her and at the same time to look at her, and, when her sleep grew deeper, to touch her, to kiss her. What I felt then was a love in the presence of something as pure, as immaterial in its feelings, as mysterious, as if I had been in the presence of those inanimate creatures that are the beauties of nature. And indeed, as soon as her sleep became at all deep, she ceased to be merely the plant that she had been; her sleep, on the margin of which I remained musing, with a fresh delight of which I never tired, but could have gone on enjoying indefinitely, was to me an entire landscape. Her sleep brought within my reach something as calm, as sensually delicious as those nights of full moon on the bay of Balbec, as serene as a lake over which the branches barely stir, where stretched out upon the sand one could listen for hours on end to the waves breaking and receding.

On entering the room, I remained standing in the doorway, not venturing to make a sound, and hearing none but that of her breath rising to expire upon her lips at intermittent and regular intervals, like the ebbing of the sea, but drowsier and softer. And at the moment when my ear absorbed that divine sound, I felt that there was, condensed in it, the whole person, the whole life of the charming captive, outstretched there before my eyes. Carriages went rattling past in the street, her features remained as motionless, as pure, her breath as light, reduced to the simplest expulsion of the necessary quantity of air. Then, seeing that her sleep would not be disturbed, I advanced cautiously, sat down on the chair that stood by the bedside, then upon the bed itself. I have spent charming evenings talking,

playing games with Albertine, but never any so pleasant as when I was watching her sleep. Granted that she might have, as she chatted with me, or played cards, that spontaneity that no actress could have imitated, it was a spontaneity carried to the second degree that was offered me by her sleep. Her hair, falling all along her rosy face, was spread out beside her on the bed, and here and there a separate straight tress gave the same effect of perspective as those moonlit trees, lank and pale, that one sees standing erect and stiff in the backgrounds of Elstir's Raphaelesque pictures.⁸⁷ If Albertine's lips were closed, her eyelids, on the other hand, seen from the point at which I was standing, seemed so loosely joined that I might almost have questioned whether she really was asleep. At the same time those drooping lids introduced into her face that perfect continuity, unbroken by any intrusion of eyes. There are people whose faces assume an unaccustomed beauty and majesty the moment they cease to look out of their eyes. I measured with my eyes Albertine outstretched at my feet. Now and then a slight, unaccountable tremor ran through her body, as the leaves of a tree are shaken for a few moments by a sudden breath of wind. She would touch her hair, then, not having arranged it to her liking, would raise her hand to it again with motions so consecutive, so deliberate, that I was convinced that she was about to awaken. Not at all, she grew calm again in the sleep from which she had not emerged. After this she remained motionless. She had laid her hand on her breast with a release of the arm so artlessly childlike that I was obliged, as I gazed at her, to suppress the smile that is provoked in us by the solemnity, the innocence, and the grace of little children. I, who was acquainted with many Albertines in one person, seemed now to see many more again, reposing by my side. Her eyebrows, arched as I had never seen them, enclosed the globes of her eyelids like a halcyon's downy nest. Races, atavisms, vices reposed upon her face. Whenever she moved her head, she created a new woman, often one whose existence I had never suspected. I seemed to possess not one, but innumerable girls. Her breathing, as it became gradually deeper, was now rhythmically raising her breast and, above it, her folded hands, her pearls, displaced in a different way by the same movement, like the boats, the anchor chains that are set swaying by the movement of the tide. Then, feeling that the tide of her sleep was full, that I would not run aground upon reefs of consciousness covered now by the high water of profound slumber, deliberately, I crept without a sound upon the bed, lay down by her side,

clasped her waist in one arm, placed my lips on her cheek and heart, then on every part of her body in turn laid my free hand, which also was raised, like the pearls, by Albertine's breathing; I myself was gently rocked by its regular motion: I had embarked upon the tide of Albertine's sleep.

Sometimes it made me taste a pleasure that was less pure. For this I had no need to make any movement, I allowed my leg to dangle against hers, like an oar that one allows to trail in the water, imparting to it now and again a gentle oscillation like the intermittent flap given to its wing by a bird asleep in the air. I chose, in gazing at her, this aspect of her face that no one ever saw and that was so beautiful. It is I suppose comprehensible that the letters we receive from a person are more or less similar and combine to trace an image of the writer so different from the person whom we know as to constitute a second personality. But how much stranger is it that a woman should be conjoined, like Rosita and Doodica,⁸⁸ with another woman whose different beauty makes us infer another character, and that in order to see one of them we must look at her in profile and the other in full face. The sound of her breathing as it grew louder might give the illusion of the breathless ecstasy of pleasure, and, when mine was at its climax, I could kiss her without having interrupted her sleep. I felt at such moments that I had been possessing her more completely, like an unconscious and unresisting object of mute nature. I was not made anxious by the words that she sometimes murmured as she slept, their meaning escaped me, and besides, whoever the unknown person might be to whom they referred, it was on my hand, on my cheek that her hand, sometimes animated by a slight frisson, tightened for an instant. I relished her sleep with a disinterested, soothing love, just as I would remain for hours listening to the unfurling of the waves. Perhaps people must be capable of making us suffer intensely before, in the hours of respite, they can procure for us the same soothing calm as does nature. I did not have to answer her as when we were chatting, and even if I could have remained silent, as for that matter I did when she was talking, still while listening to her voice I did not penetrate so far into herself. As I continued to hear, to gather from moment to moment the murmur, soothing as a barely perceptible breeze, of her pure breath, it was a whole physiological existence that was spread out before me, for me; as I used to remain for hours lying on the beach in the moonlight, so long could I have remained there gazing at her, listening to her. Sometimes one would have said that the sea was becoming rough, that the storm was

making itself felt even inside the bay, and like the bay I lay listening to the gathering roar of her breath.

Sometimes, when she was too warm, she would take off, already half asleep, her kimono, which she flung over my armchair. While she was asleep I would tell myself that all her letters were in the inner pocket of this kimono, into which she always thrust them. A signature, a rendezvous would have sufficed to prove a lie or to dispel a suspicion. When I could see that Albertine was sound asleep, leaving the foot of the bed where I had been standing motionless contemplating her, I took a step forward, seized by a burning curiosity, feeling that the secret of this other life lay offering itself to me, flaccid and defenseless, in that armchair. Perhaps I took this step forward also because to stand perfectly still and watch her sleeping became tiring after a while. And so, on tiptoe, constantly turning around to make sure that Albertine was not waking, I made my way to the armchair. There I stopped short, stood for a long time gazing at the kimono, as I had stood for a long time gazing at Albertine. But (and here perhaps I was wrong) never once did I touch the kimono, put my hand in the pocket, examine the letters. In the end, realizing that I would never make up my mind, I started back, on tiptoe, returned to Albertine's bedside and began again to watch her sleeping, she who would tell me nothing, whereas I could see lying across an arm of the chair the kimono that would have told me much. And just as people pay a hundred francs a day for a room at the hotel at Balbec in order to breathe the sea air, I felt it to be quite natural that I should spend more than that upon her since I had her breath upon my cheek, between her lips that I parted with my own, through which her life flowed against my tongue.

But this pleasure of seeing her sleep, which was as sweet to me as that of feeling her live, was cut short by another pleasure, that of seeing her awaken. It was, carried to a more profound and more mysterious degree, the same pleasure that I felt in having her under my roof. It was gratifying to me, of course, in the afternoon, when she alighted from the car, that it should be to my address that she was returning. It was even more so to me that when from the depth of sleep she climbed the last steps of the stair of dreams, it was in my room that she was reborn to consciousness and life, that she wondered for an instant: "Where am I?" and, seeing all the objects in the room around about her, the lamp whose light scarcely made her blink her eyes, was able to assure herself that she was at home on realizing that

she was waking in my home. In that first delicious moment of uncertainty, it seemed to me that once again I took a more complete possession of her since, whereas after an outing it was to her own room that she returned, it was now my room that, as soon as Albertine recognized it, was about to enclose, to contain her, without any sign of misgiving in my mistress's eyes, which remained as calm as if she had never slept at all. The uncertainty of awakening revealed by her silence was not at all revealed in her eyes.

As soon as she was able to speak she said: "My—" or "My darling—" followed by my baptismal name,⁸⁹ which, if we give the narrator the same name as the author of this book, would be "My Marcel," or "My dearest Marcel."⁹⁰ After this, I would never allow my relatives, by calling me "dearest," to rob of their priceless uniqueness the delicious words that Albertine uttered to me. As she uttered them, she pursed her lips in a little pout that she herself transformed into a kiss. As quickly as, earlier in the evening, she had fallen asleep, so quickly had she awoken.

No more than my own progression in time, no more than the act of gazing at a girl seated near me beneath the lamp, which shed upon her a different light from that of the sun when I used to behold her striding along the seashore, was this material enrichment, this autonomous progress of Albertine the determining cause of the difference between my present view of her and my original impression of her at Balbec. A longer term of years might have separated the two images without effecting so complete a change; it had come to pass, essential and sudden, when I had learned that my mistress had been virtually brought up by Mlle Vinteuil's friend. If at one time I had become excited when I thought that I saw a trace of mystery in Albertine's eyes, now I was happy only at the moments when from those eyes, from her cheeks even, as mirroring as her eyes, so gentle now but quickly turning sullen, I succeeded in expelling every trace of mystery. The image that I sought, upon which I reposed, for which I would have been willing to die, was no longer that of Albertine leading an unknown life, it was that of an Albertine as known to me as possible (and for this reason my love could not be lasting unless it remained unhappy, for by definition it did not satisfy the need of mystery), an Albertine who did not reflect a distant world, but desired nothing else—there were moments when this did indeed appear to be the case—than to be with me, to be exactly like me, an Albertine who was precisely the image of what was mine and not of the unknown. When it is thus from an hour of anguish caused by another

person, when it is from uncertainty whether we will be able to keep her or she will escape, that love is born, such love bears the mark of the revolution that has created it, it recalls very little of what we had previously seen when we thought of the person in question. And my first impressions at the sight of Albertine, at the edge of the sea, might to some small extent persist in my love of her: in reality, these earlier impressions occupy but a small place in a love of this sort, in its strength, in its agony, in its need of affection and its refuge in a calm and soothing memory with which we would prefer to abide and to learn nothing more of her whom we love, even if there be something odious to discover—all the more so if we consult only these earlier memories—such a love is made of very different material! Sometimes I put out the light before she came in. It was in the darkness, barely guided by the glow of a smoldering log, that she lay down by my side. My hands, my cheeks alone identified her without my eyes seeing her, my eyes that often were afraid of finding her changed. With the result that by virtue of this blind love she may have felt herself bathed in a warmer affection than usual.

On other evenings, I undressed, I lay down, and, with Albertine perched on the side of my bed, we resumed our game or our conversation interrupted by kisses; and, in the desire that alone makes us take an interest in the existence and character of another person, we remain so true to our own nature (even if, on the other hand, we abandon successively the different people whom we have loved in turn) that on one occasion, catching sight of myself in the mirror at the moment when I was kissing Albertine and calling her “my darling girl,” the sorrowful, passionate expression on my own face, similar to the expression it had assumed long ago with Gilberte, whom I no longer remembered, and would perhaps assume one day with another, if I was ever to forget Albertine, made me think that over and above any personal considerations (instinct requiring that we consider the person of the moment as the only true person) I was performing the duties of an ardent and painful devotion dedicated as an oblation to the youth and beauty of Woman. And yet with this desire, honoring youth with an *ex voto*,⁹¹ with my memories also of Balbec, there was blended, in the need that I felt of keeping Albertine in this way every evening by my side, something that had hitherto been unknown, at least in my amorous life, if it was not entirely novel in my life. It was a soothing power the like of which I had not known since the evenings at Combray

long ago when my mother, stooping over my bed, brought me repose in a kiss. To be sure, I would have been greatly astonished at that time, had anyone told me that I was not wholly virtuous, and more astonished still to be told that I would ever seek to deprive someone else of a pleasure. I must have known myself very slightly, for my pleasure in having Albertine to live with me was much less a positive pleasure than that of having withdrawn from the world, where everyone was free to enjoy her in turn, the blossoming girl who, if she did not bring me any great joy, was at least withholding joy from others. Ambition, fame would have left me unmoved. Even more was I incapable of feeling hatred. And yet to me to love in a carnal sense was at any rate to enjoy a triumph over countless rivals. I can never repeat it often enough; it was first and foremost an appeasement.

For all that I might, before Albertine returned, have doubted her, have imagined her in the room at Montjouvain, once she was in her peignoir and seated facing my chair, or (if, as was more frequent, I had remained in bed) at the foot of my bed, I would deposit my doubts in her, hand them over for her to relieve me of them, with the abnegation of a worshiper saying his prayer. All through the evening she might have been there, curled up in a mischievous ball on my bed, playing with me, like a great cat; her little pink nose, the tip of which she made even tinier with a coquettish glance that gave it the delicacy that we see in certain women who are inclined to be plump, might have given her a fiery and rebellious air; she might have allowed a tress of her long, dark hair to fall over a cheek of rosy wax and, half shutting her eyes, unfolding her arms, have seemed to be saying to me: "Do with me what you please!" When the time came for her to leave me, and she drew nearer to say goodnight, it was a sweetness that had become almost familial that I kissed on either side of her firm neck that now never seemed to me brown or freckled enough, as though these solid qualities had been in keeping with some loyal kindness in Albertine.

"Are you coming with us tomorrow, you grouchy man?" she asked before leaving me.

"Where are you going?"

"That will depend on the weather and on yourself. But have you written anything today, my little darling? No? Then it was hardly worth your while not coming with us. Tell me, by the way, when I came in, you knew my step, you guessed at once who it was?"

“Of course. Could I possibly be mistaken, couldn’t I tell my silly little goose’s footsteps among a thousand? She must let me take her shoes off, before she goes to bed, it will be such a pleasure to me. You are so nice and pink in all that white lace.”

Such was my answer; among the sensual expressions, we may recognize others that were peculiar to my grandmother and mother for, little by little, I was beginning to resemble all my relatives, my father who—in a very different fashion from myself, no doubt, for if things do repeat themselves, it is with great variations—took so keen an interest in the weather; and not my father only, I was becoming more and more like my Aunt Léonie. Otherwise, Albertine could not but have been a reason for my going out, so as not to leave her by herself, beyond my control. My Aunt Léonie, very devout, with whom I could have sworn that I had not a single point in common, I so passionately keen on pleasure, apparently worlds apart from that maniac who had never known any pleasure in her life and lay mumbling her rosary all day long, I who suffered from my inability to embark upon a literary career whereas she had been the one person in the family who could never understand that reading was anything more than an “amusing” pastime, which made reading, even at Eastertide, permissible on Sundays, when every serious occupation is forbidden, in order that the day may be sanctified by prayer alone.⁹² Now, although every day I found an excuse in some particular indisposition that made me so often remain in bed, a person, not Albertine, not any person that I loved, but a person with more power over me than any beloved, who had transmigrated into me, despotic to the extent of silencing at times my jealous suspicions or at least of preventing me from going to verify whether they had any foundation, and this was my Aunt Léonie. It was quite enough that I should bear an exaggerated resemblance to my father, to the extent of not being satisfied like him with consulting the barometer, but becoming a living barometer myself, it was quite enough that I should allow myself to be ordered by my Aunt Léonie to stay at home and watch the weather, from my bedroom window or even from my bed. Yet here I was talking now to Albertine, at one moment as the child that I had been at Combray used to talk to my mother, at another as my grandmother used to talk to me. When we have passed a certain age, the soul of the child that we were and the souls of the dead from whom we spring come and shower upon us in handfuls their treasures and their calamities, asking to be allowed to cooperate in the new

sentiments that we are feeling and in which, effacing their former image, we recast them in an original creation. Thus, my whole past from my earliest years, and earlier still the past of my parents and relatives blended with my impure love for Albertine the charm of an affection at once filial and maternal. We have to give hospitality, at a certain stage in our life, to all our relatives who have journeyed so far and gathered around us.

Before Albertine obeyed and took off her shoes, I opened her chemise. Her two little upstanding firm breasts were so round that they seemed not so much to be an integral part of her body as to have ripened there like fruit; and her belly (concealing the place where a man's is marred as though by an iron clamp left sticking in a statue that has been taken down from its niche) was closed, at the junction of her thighs, by two valves of a curve as somnolent, as reposeful, as cloistral as that of the horizon after the sun has set. She took off her shoes and lay down by my side.

O mighty attitudes of Man and Woman, in which there seeks to be reunited, in the innocence of the world's first days and with the humility of clay, what Creation has separated, in which Eve is astonished and submissive before the Man by whose side she has awoken, as he himself, alone still, before God who has fashioned him. Albertine folded her arms behind her dark hair, her swelling hip, her leg falling with the inflexion of a swan's neck that stretches upward and then curves over toward its starting point. It was only when she was lying right on her side that one saw a certain aspect of her face (so good and so beautiful when one looked at it from in front) which I could not endure, hook-nosed as in some of Leonardo's caricatures,⁹³ seeming to reveal the malice, the greed for gain, the deceitfulness of a spy whose presence in my house would have filled me with horror and whom that profile seemed to unmask. At once I took Albertine's face in my hands and altered its position.

"Be a good boy, promise me that if you don't come out tomorrow you will work," said my mistress as she slipped into her chemise.

"Yes, but don't put on your peignoir just yet."

Sometimes I ended by falling asleep beside her. The room had grown cold, more wood was wanted. I tried to find the bell above my head, but failed to do so, after fingering all the copper rods in turn except those between which it hung and said to Albertine who had sprung from the bed so that Françoise would not find us lying side by side: "No, come back for a moment, I can't find the bell."

Sweet moments, merry, innocent to all appearance, and yet moments in which there accumulates the never suspected possibility of disaster, which makes the amorous life the most precarious of all, that in which the unforeseeable rain of sulfur and brimstone falls after the most radiant moments, after which, without having the courage to derive its lesson from our misfortune, we set to work immediately to rebuild upon the slopes of the crater from which nothing but catastrophe can emerge. I was as nonchalant as those who imagine that their happiness will endure. It is precisely because this tender attachment has been necessary to give birth to pain—and will return moreover at intervals to calm it—that men can be sincere with each other, and even with themselves, when they pride themselves upon a woman's kindness to them, although, taking things all in all, at the heart of their intimacy there lurks continually in a secret fashion, unavowed to the rest of the world, or revealed unintentionally by questions, inquiries, a painful uncertainty. But this could not have come about without the preliminary affection, as even afterward the intermittent affection is necessary to make suffering endurable and to prevent ruptures; and the concealment of the secret hell that life can be when shared with the woman in question, carried to the pitch of an ostentatious display of an intimacy that, they pretend, is loving, expresses a genuine point of view, a universal process of cause and effect, one of the modes in which the production of pain is rendered possible.

It no longer surprised me that Albertine should be in the house and would not be going out tomorrow except with me or in the custody of Andrée. These habits of a life shared in common, this broad outline that defined my existence and within which nobody might penetrate but Albertine, also (in the future plan, of which I was still unaware, of my life to come, like the plan traced by an architect for monuments that will not be erected until long afterward) the remoter lines, parallel to the others but vaster, that sketched in me, like a lonely hermitage, the somewhat rigid and monotonous formula of my future loves, had in reality been traced that night at Balbec when, in the little train, after Albertine had revealed to me who it was that had brought her up, I had decided at any cost to remove her from certain influences and to prevent her from straying out of my sight for some days to come. Day after day had gone by, these habits had become mechanical, but, like those primitive rites the meaning of which History seeks to discover, I might (but would not) have said to anybody who asked me to explain the

meaning of this life of seclusion that I carried so far as not to go anymore to the theater, that its origin was the anxiety of a certain evening and my need to prove to myself, during the days that followed, that the girl about whose unfortunate childhood I had learned would not find it possible, if she had so wished, to expose herself to similar temptations. I no longer thought, except very rarely, about these possibilities, but they were nevertheless to remain vaguely present in my consciousness. The fact that I was destroying them—or trying to destroy them—day by day was doubtless the reason why it gave me such pleasure to kiss those cheeks that were no more beautiful than many others; beneath any carnal attraction that is at all profound, there is the permanent possibility of danger.

I had promised Albertine that, if I did not go out with her, I would settle down to work. But the next morning, just as if, taking advantage of our being asleep, the house had miraculously flown, I awoke in different weather beneath another clime. We do not begin to work at the moment of landing in a strange country to the conditions of which we have to adapt ourselves. But each day was for me a different country. Even my laziness itself, beneath the new forms that it had assumed, how was I to recognize it? Sometimes, on days when the weather was, according to everyone, irremediably bad, the mere act of staying in the house, situated in the midst of a steady and continuous rain, had all the gliding charm, the soothing silence, the interest of a sea voyage; at another time, on a bright day, to lie still in bed was to let the lights and shadows play around me as around a tree trunk. Or yet again, in the first strokes of the bell of a neighboring convent, rare as the early-morning worshipers, barely whitening the dark sky with their fluttering hail showers, melted and scattered by the warm breeze, I had discerned one of those tempestuous, disordered, delightful days, when the roofs soaked by an intermittent shower and dried by a breath of wind or a ray of sunshine let fall a gurgling raindrop, and, as they wait for the wind to resume its turn, preen their iridescent pigeon's-breast slates in the momentary sunshine, one of those days filled with so many changes of weather, atmospheric incidents, storms, that the idle man does not feel that he has wasted them, because he has been taking an interest in the activity that, in default of himself, the atmosphere, acting in a sense in his stead, has displayed; days similar to those times of revolution or war that do not seem empty to the schoolboy who has played truant from his classroom,

because by loitering outside the Palais de Justice⁹⁴ or by reading the newspapers, he has the illusion of finding, in the events that have occurred, failing the lesson that he has not learned, an intellectual profit and an excuse for his idleness; days to which we may compare those on which there occurs in our life some exceptional crisis from which the man who has never done anything imagines that he is going to acquire, if it comes to a happy conclusion, laborious habits; for example, the morning on which he sets out for a duel that is to be fought under particularly dangerous conditions; then he is suddenly made aware, at the moment when it is perhaps about to be taken from him, of the value of a life of which he might have made use to begin some important work, or merely to enjoy pleasures, and of which he has failed to make any use at all. "If only I am not killed," he says to himself, "how I will settle down to work that very minute, and how I will enjoy myself too!" Life has in fact suddenly acquired, in his eyes, a higher value, because he puts into life everything that it seems to him capable of giving, instead of the little that he normally demands of it. He sees it in the light of his desire, not as his experience has taught him that he was apt to make it, that is to say so mediocre. It has, at that moment, become filled with work, travel, mountain climbing, all the wonderful things that, he tells himself, the fatal outcome of the duel may render impossible, whereas they were already impossible before there was any question of a duel, owing to the bad habits that, even without the duel, would have persisted. He returns home without even a scratch, but he continues to find the same obstacles to pleasures, excursions, travel, to everything of which he had feared for a moment to be forever deprived by death; to deprive him of them life is sufficient. As for work—exceptional circumstances having the effect of intensifying what previously existed in a man, labor in the laborious, idleness in the lazy—he takes a holiday.

I followed his example and did as I had always done since my first resolution to become a writer, which I had made long ago, but which seemed to me to date from yesterday, because I had regarded each intervening day as nonexistent. I treated this day in a similar fashion, allowing its showers of rain and bursts of sunshine to pass without doing anything, and vowing that I would begin to work the next day. But then I was no longer the same man beneath a cloudless sky; the golden note of the bells did not contain merely (as honey contains) light, but the sensation of light and also the sickly savor of preserved fruits (because at Combray it

had often loitered like a wasp over our cleared dinner table). On this day of dazzling sunshine, to remain until nightfall with my eyes shut was a thing permitted, customary, salubrious, pleasant, seasonable, like keeping the outside shutters closed against the heat. It was in such weather as this that at the beginning of my second visit to Balbec I used to hear the violins of the orchestra amid the bluish flow of the rising tide. How much more fully did I possess Albertine today! There were days when the sound of a bell striking the hour bore upon the sphere of its resonance a plaque so cool, so richly loaded with moisture or with light that it was like a transcription for the blind, or, if you prefer, a musical interpretation of the charm of rain or of the charm of the sun. So much so that, at that moment, as I lay in bed, with my eyes shut, I said to myself that everything is capable of transposition and that a universe that was merely audible might be as full of variety as the other. Traveling lazily upstream from day to day, as in a boat, and seeing appear before my eyes an endlessly changing succession of enchanted memories, which I did not select, which a moment earlier had been invisible, and which my mind presented to me one after another, without my being free to choose them, I pursued idly over that continuous expanse my stroll in the sunshine.

Those morning concerts at Balbec were not remote in time. And yet, at that comparatively recent moment, I had given but little thought to Albertine. Indeed, on the very first mornings after my arrival, I had not known that she was at Balbec. From whom then had I learned it? Oh, yes, from Aimé. It was a fine sunny day like this. Good old Aimé! He was glad to see me again. But he does not like Albertine. Not everybody can like her. Yes, it was he who told me that she was at Balbec. But how did he know? Ah! he had met her, had thought that she had behaved badly. At that moment, as I approached Aimé's story from another facet from the one that it had presented to me when he had told it to me, my thoughts, which hitherto had been sailing blissfully over these untroubled waters, exploded suddenly, as though they had struck an invisible and dangerous mine, insidiously moored at this point in my memory. He had told me that he had met her, that he had thought her behavior bad. What had he meant by bad behavior? I had understood him to mean a vulgar manner, because, to contradict him in advance, I had declared that she was most refined. But no, perhaps he had meant Gomorrah. ⁹⁵ She was with another girl, perhaps their arms were around one another's waist, they were staring at other

women, they were indeed displaying a “behavior” that I had never seen Albertine adopt in my presence. Who was the other girl, where had Aimé met her, this odious Albertine? I tried to recall exactly what Aimé had said to me, in order to see whether it could be made to refer to what I imagined, or he had meant nothing more than common manners. But in vain might I ask myself the question, the person who put it and the person who might supply the recollection were, alas, one and the same person, myself, who was momentarily duplicated but without adding anything to my stature. Question as I might, it was myself who answered, I learned nothing more. I no longer gave a thought to Mlle Vinteuil. Born of a new suspicion, the fit of jealousy from which I was suffering was new also, or rather it was only the prolongation, the extension of that suspicion, it had the same theater, which was no longer Montjouvain, but the road upon which Aimé had met Albertine, and for its object the various friends one or other of whom might have been with Albertine that day. It was perhaps a certain Élisabeth, or else perhaps those two girls whom Albertine had watched in the mirror at the casino, while appearing not to see them. She had doubtless been having relations with them, and also with Esther, Bloch’s cousin. Such relations, had they been revealed to me by a third person, would have been enough almost to kill me, but as it was myself who was imagining them, I took care to add sufficient uncertainty to deaden the pain. We succeed in absorbing daily, under the guise of suspicions, in enormous doses, this same idea that we are being betrayed, a quite minute quantity of which might prove fatal, if injected by the needle of a wounding word. It is no doubt for that reason, and by a survival of the instinct of self-preservation, that the same jealous man does not hesitate to form the most terrible suspicions upon a basis of innocuous details, provided that, whenever any proof is brought to him, he may decline to accept its evidence. Moreover, love is an incurable malady, like those diathetic states in which rheumatism affords the sufferer a brief respite only to be replaced by epileptiform headaches. If my jealous suspicion was calmed, I then felt a grudge against Albertine for not having been affectionate with me, perhaps for having made fun of me with Andrée. I thought with alarm of the idea that she must have formed if Andrée had repeated all our conversations; the future loomed black and menacing. This mood of depression left me only if a new jealous suspicion drove me to make other inquiries or if, on the other hand, Albertine’s display of affection made my happiness seem insignificant to me. Who could this girl

be? I would have to write to Aimé, to try to see him, and then I would check his statement by talking to Albertine, making her confess. In the meantime, convinced that it must be Bloch's cousin, I asked Bloch himself, who had not the remotest idea of my purpose, simply to let me see her photograph, or, better still, to arrange for me to meet her.

How many persons, cities, roads jealousy makes us eager thus to know! It is a thirst to know, thanks to which, with regard to various isolated points, we end by acquiring every possible notion in turn except those that we require. We can never tell whether a suspicion will not arise, for, all of a sudden, we recall a comment that was not clear, an alibi that cannot have been given to us without a purpose. And yet, we have not seen the person again, but there is such a thing as a deferred jealousy, that is born only after we have left her, a jealousy that hits us as we descend the staircase.⁹⁶ Perhaps the habit that I had formed of keeping in my heart certain desires, the desire for a young girl of a good family such as I used to see pass beneath my window escorted by her governess, and especially of the girl whom Saint-Loup had mentioned to me, the one who frequented houses of ill repute, the desire for beautiful lady's-maids, and especially for Mme Putbus's,⁹⁷ the desire to go to the country in early spring, to see once again hawthorns, apple trees in blossom, storms at sea; the desire for Venice, the desire to settle down to work, the desire to live like other people—perhaps the habit of storing up, without assuaging any of them, all these desires, contenting myself with the promise, made to myself, that I would not forget to satisfy them one day, perhaps this habit, so many years old already, of perpetual postponement, of what M. de Charlus used to castigate under the name of procrastination, had become so prevalent in me that it assumed control of my jealous suspicions also and, while it made me make a mental note that I would not fail, someday, to have an explanation from Albertine with regard to the girl, or possibly the girls (this part of the story was confused, effaced, that is to say undecipherable, in my memory) with whom Aimé had met her, made me also postpone this explanation. In any case, I would not mention it this evening to my mistress for fear of making her think me jealous and so offending her. And yet when, on the following day, Bloch had sent me the photograph of his cousin Esther, I made haste to forward it to Aimé. And at the same moment I remembered that Albertine had that morning refused me a pleasure that might indeed have tired her. Was that in order to reserve it for someone else? This afternoon, perhaps?

For whom? Thus it is that jealousy is endless, for even if the beloved object, by dying for instance, can no longer provoke it by her actions, it so happens that posthumous memories, of later origin than any event, take shape suddenly in our minds as though they were events also, memories that hitherto we have never properly explored, which had seemed to us unimportant, and to which our own reflection upon them has been sufficient, without any external facts, to give a new and terrible meaning. We have no need of her company, it is enough to be alone in our room, thinking, for new betrayals of us by our mistress to come to light, even though she be dead. And so we ought not to fear in love, as in everyday life, the future alone, but even the past that often does not materialize for us until the future has come and gone; and we are not speaking only of the past that we discover long afterward, but of the past that we have long kept stored up in ourselves and learn suddenly how to interpret.

No matter, I was very happy, now that afternoon was turning to evening, that the hour was not far off when I would be able to appeal to Albertine's company for the appeasement that I needed. Unfortunately, the evening that followed was one of those on which this appeasement was not afforded me, on which the kiss that Albertine would give me when she left me for the night, very different from her usual kiss, would no more soothe me than my mother's kiss had soothed me long ago, on days when she was vexed with me and I dared not send for her, but at the same time knew that I would not be able to sleep. Such evenings were now those on which Albertine had formed for the next day some plan of which she did not wish me to know. Had she confided in me, I would have employed, to assure its successful execution, an ardor that none but Albertine could have inspired in me. But she told me nothing, nor had she any need to tell me anything; as soon as she came in, before she had even crossed the threshold of my room, while she was still wearing her hat or toque, I had already detected the unknown, restive, desperate, indomitable desire. Now, these were often the evenings when I had awaited her return with the most loving thoughts and looked forward to throwing my arms around her neck with the warmest affection. Alas, those misunderstandings that I had often had with my parents, whom I found cold or irritated at the moment when I was running to embrace them, overflowing with love, are nothing in comparison with those that occur between lovers. The anguish then is far less superficial, far harder to endure, it has its abode in a deeper layer of the heart. On that evening,

however, Albertine was obliged to mention the plan that she had in her mind; I gathered at once that she wished to go the next day to pay a call on Mme Verdurin, a call to which in itself I would have had no objection. But evidently her object was to meet someone there, to prepare some future pleasure. Otherwise she would not have attached so much importance to this call. That is to say, she would not have kept on assuring me that it was of no importance. I had in the course of my life developed in the opposite direction to those races that make use of phonetic writing only after having considered the letters of the alphabet as a set of symbols; for so many years I had sought for the real life and thought of other people only in the direct statements with which they furnished me of their own free will; failing these I had come to attach importance, on the contrary, only to the evidence that is not a rational and analytical expression of the truth; the words themselves did not enlighten me unless they could be interpreted in the same way as a sudden rush of blood to the cheeks of a person who is embarrassed, or, what is even more telling, a sudden silence. Some adverb (such as that used by M. de Cambremer when he understood that I was a “writer,” and, not having spoken to me before, as he was describing a visit that he had paid to the Verdurins, turned to me with: “*Why*, Borrelli was there!”)⁹⁸ bursting into flames at the unintended, sometimes perilous contact of two ideas that the speaker has not expressed, but which, by applying the appropriate methods of analysis or electrolysis I was able to extract from it, told me more than a long speech. Albertine sometimes let slip into her conversation one or other of these precious amalgams that I made haste to “treat” in order to transform them into lucid ideas.

It is, moreover, one of the most terrible things for the lover that if particular details—which only experiment, espionage, of all the possible realizations, would ever make him know—are so difficult to discover, the truth on the other hand is easy to penetrate or merely to sense. Often I had seen her, at Balbec, fasten upon some girls who came past us a sudden and lingering stare, like a physical contact, after which, if I knew the girls, she would say to me: “Suppose we asked them to join us? I would so love to be rude to them.” And now, for some time past, doubtless since she had succeeded in reading my thoughts, no request to me to invite anyone, not a word, never even a sidelong glance from her eyes, which had become objectless and mute, and as revealing, with the vague and vacant expression of the rest of her face, as had been their magnetic swerve before. Now it

was impossible for me to reproach her, or to ply her with questions about things that she would have declared to be so petty, so trivial, things that I had stored up in my mind simply for the pleasure of nitpicking. It is hard enough to say: "Why did you stare at that girl who went past?" but a great deal harder to say: "Why did you not stare at her?" And yet I knew quite well, or at least I should have known, if I had not chosen to believe Albertine's assertions rather than all the trivialities contained in a glance, proved by it and by some contradiction or other in her comments, a contradiction that often I did not perceive until long after I had left her, which made me suffer all night long, which I never dared mention to her again, but which nevertheless continued to honor my memory from time to time with its periodical visits. Often, in the case of these furtive or sidelong glances on the beach at Balbec or in the streets of Paris, I might sometimes ask myself whether the person who provoked them was not merely at the moment when she passed an object of desire but an old acquaintance, or else some girl who had simply been mentioned to her, and of whom, when I heard about it, I was astonished that anybody might have spoken to her, so utterly unlike was she to anyone that Albertine could possibly wish to know. But the Gomorrah of today is a jigsaw puzzle made up of fragments that come from places where we least expected to find them. Thus I once saw at Rivebelle a big dinner party of ten women, all of whom I happened to know—at least by name—women as dissimilar as possible, perfectly united nevertheless, so much so that I never saw a party so homogeneous albeit so composite.

To return to the girls whom we passed in the street, never did Albertine gaze at an old person, man or woman, with such fixity, or on the other hand, with such reserve, and as though she saw nothing. Cuckolded husbands who know nothing know everything all the same. But it requires more accurate and abundant evidence to create a scene of jealousy. Besides, if jealousy helps us to discover a certain tendency to falsehood in the woman whom we love, it multiplies this tendency a hundredfold when the woman has discovered that we are jealous. She lies (to an extent to which she has never lied to us before), whether from pity, or from fear, or because she instinctively withdraws by a flight that is symmetrical to our investigations. Certainly, there are love affairs in which from the start a loose woman has posed as virtue incarnate in the eyes of the man who is in love with her. But how many others consist of two diametrically opposite periods! In the first,

the woman speaks almost spontaneously, with slight modifications, of her zest for sensual pleasure, of the libertine life that it has made her lead, things all of which she will deny later on, with the last breath in her body, to the same man when she senses that he is jealous and spying upon her. He begins to think with regret of the days of those first confidences, the memory of which torments him nevertheless. If the woman continued to make them, she would furnish him almost unaided with the secret of her misconduct that he has been vainly pursuing day after day. And besides, what a surrender that would mean, what trust, what friendship! If she cannot live without betraying him, at least she would be betraying him as a friend, telling him of her pleasures, associating him with them. And he thinks with regret of the sort of life that the early stages of their love seemed to promise, which the sequel has rendered impossible, making of that love a thing atrociously painful, which will render a final parting, according to circumstances, either inevitable or impossible.

Sometimes the script from which I deciphered Albertine's falsehoods, without being ideographic, needed simply to be read backward; so this evening she had flung at me in a careless tone the message, intended to pass almost unheeded: "I may go and see the Verdurins tomorrow. I don't actually know whether I will go, I don't really want to." A childish anagram of the admission: "I will go to see the Verdurins tomorrow, it is absolutely certain, for I attach the utmost importance to the visit." This apparent hesitation indicated a resolute decision and was intended to diminish the importance of the visit while warning me of it. Albertine always adopted a tone of uncertainty for her irrevocable decisions. Mine was no less irrevocable. I would take steps to arrange things so that this visit to Mme Verdurin did not take place. Jealousy is often only an anxious need to be tyrannical, applied to matters of love. I had doubtless inherited from my father this abrupt, arbitrary desire to threaten the people whom I loved best in the hopes with which they were lulling themselves with a sense of security that I determined to expose to them as false; when I saw that Albertine had planned without my knowledge, behind my back, an expedition that I would have done everything in the world to make easier and more pleasant for her, had she taken me into her confidence, I said carelessly, so as to make her tremble, that I intended to go out the next day myself.

I began to suggest to Albertine other expeditions in directions that would have made this visit to the Verdurins impossible, in words stamped with a feigned indifference beneath which I strove to conceal my agitation. But she had detected it. It encountered in her the electric shock of a contrary will that violently repulsed it; I could see the sparks flash from Albertine's eyes. Of what use, though, was it to pay attention to what her pupils were saying at that moment? How had I failed to observe long ago that Albertine's eyes belonged to the class which even in a quite ordinary person seem to be composed of a number of fragments, because of all the places in which the person wishes to be—and to conceal her desire to be—that day? Eyes that their mendacity keeps ever immobile and passive, but dynamic, measurable in the yards or miles to be traversed before they reach the desired, the implacably desired meeting place, eyes that are not so much smiling at the pleasure that tempts them as they are shadowed with melancholy and discouragement because there may be a difficulty in their getting to the meeting place. Even when you hold them in your hands, such beings are creatures of flight. To understand the emotions that they arouse, and that other beings, even better looking, do not arouse, we must take into account that they are not immobile but in motion, and add to their person a sign corresponding to what in physics is the sign that signifies velocity.⁹⁹

If you upset their plans for the day, they confess to you the pleasure that they had concealed from you: "I did so want to go to tea at five o'clock with so-and-so of whom I am so fond!" Very well, if, six months later, you come to know the person in question, you will learn that the girl whose plans you upset, who, caught in the trap, in order that you might set her free, confessed to you that she was in the habit of taking tea like this with a dear friend, every day at the hour at which you did not see her, has never once been inside this person's house, that they have never taken tea together, since the girl used to explain that her whole time was taken up by none other than yourself.

And so the person with whom she confessed that she had gone to tea, with whom she begged you to allow her to go to tea, that person, the excuse that necessity made her plead, was not the real person, there was somebody, something else! Something else, what? Someone, who? Alas, the kaleidoscopic eyes staring off into space and shadowed with melancholy might enable us perhaps to measure distance, but do not indicate direction. The boundless field of possibilities extends before us, and if by any chance

the reality presented itself to our gaze, it would be so far beyond the bounds of possibility that, dashing suddenly against this boundary wall, we would fall over backward. It is not even essential that we should have proof of her movement and flight, it is enough that we should guess them. She had promised us a letter, we were calm, we were no longer in love. The letter has not come; no courier appears with it; what can have happened? Anxiety is born afresh, and love. It is such people more than any others who inspire love in us, for our desolation. For every new anxiety that we feel on their account strips them in our eyes of some of their personality. We were resigned to suffering, thinking that we loved outside ourselves, and we perceive that our love is a function of our sorrow, that our love perhaps is our sorrow, and that its object is, to a very small extent only, the girl with the raven hair. But when all is said and done, it is such people more than any others who inspire love. Most often love does not have as its object a human body, except when an emotion, the fear of losing it, the uncertainty of finding it again have been infused into it. Now this sort of anxiety has a great affinity for bodies. It adds to them a quality that surpasses even beauty, which is one of the reasons why we see men who are indifferent to the most beautiful women fall passionately in love with others who appear to us ugly. To such creatures, these creatures of flight, their own nature and our anxiety fasten wings. And even when they are in our company the look in their eyes seems to warn us that they are about to take flight. The proof of this beauty, surpassing beauty itself, that wings add, is that very often the same person is, in our eyes, alternately wingless and winged. Afraid of losing her, we forget all the others. Sure of keeping her, we compare her with those others whom at once we prefer to her. And as these emotions and these certainties may vary from week to week, a person may one week see sacrificed to her everything that gave us pleasure, in the following week be sacrificed herself, and so on for a very long time. All of which would be incomprehensible did we not know from the experience, that every man shares, of having at least once in a lifetime ceased to love, forgotten a woman, for how very little a person counts in herself when she is no longer—or is not yet—permeable to our emotions. And, of course, what we say of creatures of flight is equally true of those in prison, the captive women that we suppose we will never be able to possess. And so men detest procuresses, for these facilitate the flight, enhance the temptation, but if on the other hand they are in love with a cloistered woman, they willingly have

recourse to a procuress to make her emerge from her prison and bring her to them. Insofar as relations with women whom we abduct are less permanent than others, the reason is that the fear of not succeeding in procuring them or the dread of seeing them escape is the whole of our love for them and that once they have been carried off from their husbands, torn from their footlights, cured of the temptation to leave us, dissociated in short from our emotion whatever it may be, they are only themselves, that is to say almost nothing, and, so long desired, are soon forsaken by the very man who was so afraid of their forsaking him.

How, I have asked, did I not guess this? But had I not guessed it from the first day at Balbec? Had I not detected in Albertine one of those girls beneath whose envelope of flesh more hidden persons are stirring, than in—I do not say a pack of cards still in its box, a closed cathedral, or a theater before we enter it—but than in the whole, vast, ever changing crowd? Not only all these persons, but the desire, the voluptuous memory, the desperate quest of all these persons. At Balbec I had not been troubled because I had never even supposed that one day I would be following a trail, even a false trail. No matter, this had given Albertine, in my eyes, the plenitude of a person filled to the brim by the superimposition of so many persons, of so many desires and voluptuous memories of persons. And now that she had one day let fall the words “Mlle Vinteuil,” I would have wished not to tear off her dress in order to see her body but through her body to see and read that notebook of her memories and her future, passionate engagements.

How suddenly do the things that are probably the most insignificant assume an extraordinary value when a person whom we love (or who has lacked only this duplicity to make us love her) conceals them from us! In itself, suffering does not of necessity inspire in us sentiments of love or hatred toward the person who causes it: a surgeon can hurt our body without arousing any personal emotion in us. But a woman who has continued for some time to assure us that we are everything in the world to her, without being herself everything in the world to us, a woman whom we enjoy seeing, kissing, taking upon our knee, we are astonished if we merely feel from a sudden resistance that she is not at our disposal. Disappointment may then revive in us the forgotten memory of an old anguish, which we know, all the same, to have been provoked not by this woman but by others whose betrayals are spread out like milestones in our past life. And, if it comes to that, how do we have the courage to wish to live, how can we lift

a finger to preserve ourselves from death, in a world in which love is provoked only by lies and consists solely in our need to see our sufferings appeased by the person who has made us suffer? To rescue us from the despondency that follows our discovery of her lies and her resistance, there is the sad remedy of trying to act—against her will, with the help of people whom we feel to be more closely involved than we are in her life—upon her who is resisting us and lying to us, to play the cheat in turn, to make ourselves loathed. But the suffering caused by such a love is of the sort that must inevitably lead the sufferer to seek in a change of posture an illusory comfort. These means of action are not wanting, alas! And the horror of the kind of love that anxiety alone has engendered lies in the fact that we turn over and over incessantly in our cage the most trivial utterances; not to mention that rarely do the people for whom we feel this love appeal to us especially physically, since it is not our deliberate preference that chooses for us, but the accident of a minute of anguish, a minute indefinitely prolonged by our weakness of character, which repeats its experiments every evening until it yields to sedatives. No doubt my love for Albertine was not the most barren of those to which, through lack of willpower, a man may descend, for it was not entirely platonic; she did give me carnal satisfactions and, besides, she was intelligent. But all this was supererogatory. What occupied my mind was not the intelligent remark that she might have made, but some chance utterance that had aroused in me a doubt as to her actions. I tried to remember whether she had said this or that, in what tone, at what moment, in response to what words of mine, to reconstruct the whole scene of her dialogue with me, to recall at what moment she had expressed a desire to call upon the Verdurins, what words of mine had brought that look of vexation to her face. The most important matter might have been in question without my giving myself so much trouble to establish the truth, to restore the precise atmosphere and color. No doubt, after these anxieties have intensified to a degree that we find unbearable, we do sometimes manage to calm them entirely for an evening. The party to which the mistress whom we love is to go, the true nature of which our mind has been toiling for days to discover, we are invited to it also; our mistress has neither looks nor words for anyone but us; we take her home and then we enjoy, all our anxieties dispelled, a repose as complete, as healing, as the one that we enjoy at times in the profound sleep that comes after a long walk. And no doubt such repose deserves that we

should pay a high price for it. But would it not have been simpler not to purchase for ourselves, deliberately, the preceding anxiety, and at a higher price still? Besides, we know all too well that however profound these momentary *détentes* may be, anxiety will still be the stronger. Often indeed it is revived by a remark that was intended to bring us repose. But most often we have simply exchanged one anxiety for another. One of the words of the remark that was meant to calm us sets our suspicions on another track. The demands of our jealousy and the blindness of our credulity are greater than the woman whom we love could ever suppose. When, spontaneously, she swears to us that some man is nothing more to her than a friend, she distresses us by informing us—a thing we never suspected—that he has been her friend. While she is telling us, as proof of her sincerity, how they took tea together, that very afternoon, at each word that she utters the invisible, the unsuspected takes shape before our eyes. She admits that he has asked her to be his mistress, and we suffer agonies at the thought that she can have listened to his overtures. She refused them, she says. But presently, when we recall what she told us, we will ask ourselves whether her story is really true, for there is lacking, between the different things that she said to us, that logical and necessary connection that, more than the facts related, is a sign of the truth. Besides, there was that terrible note of scorn in her: “I said to him no, categorically,” which is to be found in every class of society, when a woman is lying. We must nevertheless thank her for having refused, encourage her by our kindness to repeat these cruel confidences in the future. At the most, we may remark: “But if he had already made advances to you, why did you accept his invitation to tea?” “So that he would not be angry with me and say that I hadn’t been nice to him.” And we dare not reply that by refusing she would perhaps have been nicer to us.

Albertine alarmed me further when she said that I was quite right to say, out of regard for her reputation, that I was not her lover, since “for that matter,” she went on, “it’s perfectly true that you aren’t.” I was not her lover perhaps in the full sense of the word, but then, was I to suppose that all the things that we did together she did also with all the other men whose mistress she swore to me that she had never been? The desire to know at all costs what Albertine was thinking, whom she was seeing, with whom she was in love, how strange it was that I should be sacrificing everything to this need, since I had felt the same need to know, in the case of Gilberte,

names, facts, which now left me quite indifferent! I was perfectly well aware that in themselves Albertine's actions were of no greater interest. It is curious that a first love, if by the fragile state in which it leaves our heart it opens the way to our subsequent loves, does not at least provide us, in view of the identity of symptoms and sufferings, with the means of curing them. After all, is there any need to know a fact? Are we not aware beforehand, in a general way, of the mendacity and even the discretion of those women who have something to conceal? Is there any possibility of error? They make a virtue of their silence, when we would give anything to make them speak. And we feel certain that they have assured their accomplice: "I never say anything. It won't be through me that anybody will hear about it, I never say anything."

A man may give his fortune, his life for a person, and yet know quite well that in ten years' time, more or less, he would refuse her that fortune, prefer to keep his life. For then the person would be detached from him, alone, that is to say insignificant. What attaches us to people are those thousand roots, those innumerable threads that are our memories of last night, our hopes for tomorrow morning, those continuous trammels of habit from which we can never free ourselves. Just as there are misers who hoard money from generosity, so we are spendthrifts who spend from avarice, and it is not so much to a person that we sacrifice our life as to all that the person has been able to attach to herself of our hours, our days, of the things compared with which the life not yet lived, the relatively future life, seems to us more remote, more detached, less intimate, less our own. What we require is to disentangle ourselves from those trammels that are so much more important than the person, but they have the effect of creating in us temporary obligations toward her, obligations that mean that we dare not leave her for fear of being misjudged by her, whereas later on we would so dare, for, detached from us, she would no longer dwell in us, and because in reality we create for ourselves obligations (even if, by an apparent contradiction, they should lead to suicide) toward ourselves alone.

If I was not in love with Albertine (and of this I could not be sure), then there was nothing extraordinary in the place that she occupied in my life: we live only with what we do not love, with what we have brought to live with us only to kill the intolerable love, whether it be for a woman, for a place, or again for a woman embodying a place. Indeed, we would be sorely afraid to begin to love again if a new separation were to occur. I had not yet

reached this stage with Albertine. Her lies, her admissions, left me to complete the task of elucidating the truth. Her innumerable lies, because she was not content with merely lying, like everyone who imagines that he or she is loved, but because by nature, quite apart from this, she was mendacious, and so inconsistent moreover that, even if she told me the truth every time, told me what, for example, she thought of other people, she would say each time something different; her admissions, because, being so rare, so quickly cut short, they left between them, insofar as they concerned the past, huge intervals completely blank over the whole expanse of which I was obliged to retrace—and for that first of all to discover—her life. As for the present, so far as I could interpret the sibylline utterances of Françoise, it was not only about particular details, it was as a whole that Albertine was lying to me, and “one fine day” I would see everything that Françoise pretended to know, what she refused to tell me, what I dared not ask her. It was no doubt with the same jealousy that she had felt in the past with regard to Eulalie that Françoise would speak of the most improbable things, so vague that one could at the most suppose them to convey the highly improbable insinuation that the poor captive (who was a lover of women) preferred marriage with somebody who did not appear altogether to be me. If this were so, how, notwithstanding her telepathic powers, could Françoise have known this? Certainly, Albertine’s statements could give me no definite enlightenment, for they were as different day by day as the colors of a spinning top that has almost come to a standstill. However, it seemed that it was hatred, more than anything else, that impelled Françoise to speak. Not a day went by without her saying to me, and I in my mother’s absence enduring, such speeches as:

“To be sure, you yourself are kind, and I will never forget the debt of gratitude that I owe to you” (this probably so that I might establish new claims upon her gratitude). “But the house has become a plague spot now that kindness has set up deceitfulness in it, now that cleverness is protecting the stupidest person that ever was seen, now that refinement, good manners, wit, dignity in all things, the semblance and the reality of a prince, allow themselves to be dictated to and plotted against and me to be humiliated—me who has been forty years in the family—by vice, everything that is most vulgar and base.”

What Françoise resented most about Albertine was having to take orders from somebody who was not one of ourselves, and also the strain of the

additional housework that was affecting the health of our old servant, who would not, for all that, accept any help in the house, not being a “good for nothing.” This in itself would have accounted for her nervous exhaustion, for her furious hatred. Certainly, she would have liked to see Albertine-Esther banished from the house. This was Françoise’s dearest wish. And, by consoling her, its fulfillment alone would have given our old servant some repose. But to my mind there was more in it than this. So violent a hatred could have originated only in an over-strained body. And, even more than consideration, Françoise was in need of sleep.

Albertine went to take off her things and, so as to lose no time in finding out what I wanted to know, I attempted to telephone Andrée; I seized the telephone receiver, invoked the implacable Deities,¹⁰⁰ but succeeded only in arousing their fury that expressed itself in the single word “Busy!” Andrée was indeed engaged in talking to someone else. As I waited for her to finish her conversation, I asked myself how it was—now that so many of our painters are seeking to revive the feminine portraits of the eighteenth century, in which the cleverly devised setting is a pretext for portraying expressions of expectation, sulking, interest, reverie—how it was that none of our modern Bouchers or Fragonards had yet painted, instead of *The Letter* or *The Harpsichord*,¹⁰¹ this scene that might be entitled *At the Telephone*, in which there would come spontaneously to the lips of the listener a smile all the more genuine in that it is conscious of being unobserved. Finally, Andrée could hear me: “You are coming to call for Albertine tomorrow?” I asked, and as I pronounced Albertine’s name, I thought of the envy I had felt for Swann when he said to me on the day of the Princesse de Guermantes’s party: “Come and see Odette,” and I had thought how, when all was said, there must be something powerful in a given name, which, in the eyes of the whole world, including Odette herself, had on Swann’s lips alone this entirely possessive sense. Such an act of possession—summed up in a single word—over the whole existence of another person had appeared to me, whenever I was in love, to be sweet indeed! But, in fact, when we are in a position to say it, either we no longer care, or else habit has not dulled the force of affection but has changed its pleasure into pain. Mendacity is a very small matter, we live in the midst of it without doing anything but smile at it, we practice it without meaning to do any harm to anyone, but our jealousy is wounded by it, and sees more than the lies conceal (often our mistress refuses to spend the evening with

us and goes to the theater simply so that we will not notice that she is not looking good), just as jealousy very often remains blind to what the truth is concealing. But jealousy can extract nothing, for those women who swear that they are not lying would refuse, even at knifepoint, to confess their true character. I knew that I alone was in a position to say “Albertine” in that tone to Andrée. And yet, to Albertine, to Andrée, and to myself, I felt that I was nothing. And I realized the impossibility that love comes up against. We imagine that love has as its object a being whom we see lying down before our eyes, enclosed within a human body. Alas, it is the extension of that being to all the points in space and time that this being has occupied and will occupy. If we do not possess its contact with this or that place, this or that hour, we do not possess it. But we cannot touch all these points. If only they were indicated to us, we might perhaps contrive to reach out to them. But we grope for them without finding them. Hence mistrust, jealousy, persecutions. We waste precious time on absurd clues and pass by the truth without suspecting it.

But already one of the irascible deities, with vertiginously agile servants, was irritated, not because I was speaking, but because I was saying nothing.

“Come along, I’ve been holding the line for you all this time; I will cut you off.”

However, she did nothing of the sort but, evoking Andrée’s presence, enveloped it, like the great poet that a demoiselle of the telephone always is, in the atmosphere peculiar to the home, the quarter, the very life itself of Albertine’s friend.

“Is that you?” asked Andrée, whose voice was projected toward me with an instantaneous speed by the goddess whose privilege it is to make sounds faster than light.

“Listen,” I replied, “go wherever you like, anywhere, except to Mme Verdurin’s. You must at all cost keep Albertine away from there tomorrow.”

“But that’s just where she’s supposed to go tomorrow.”

“Ah!”

But I was obliged to break off the conversation for a moment and to make menacing gestures, for if Françoise continued—as though it had been something as unpleasant as vaccination or as dangerous as the airplane—to refuse to learn to use the telephone, whereby she would have spared us the trouble of conversations that she might intercept without any harm, on the other hand she would at once come into the room whenever I was engaged in a conversation so private that I was particularly anxious to keep it from her ears. When she had left the room, not without lingering to take away various things that had been lying there since the previous day and might perfectly well have been left there for an hour longer, and to place in the grate a log that was quite unnecessary in view of my burning fever at the intruder’s presence and my fear of finding myself “cut off” by the operator: “I beg your pardon,” I said to Andrée, “I was interrupted. Is it absolutely certain that she has to go to the Verdurins’ tomorrow?”

“Absolutely, but I can tell her that you don’t like it.”

“No, not at all, but it is possible that I may come with you.”

“Ah!” said Andrée, in a tone of annoyance and as though alarmed by my audacity, which was all the more encouraged by her opposition.

“Then I will say goodbye, and please forgive me for disturbing you for nothing.”

“Not at all,” said Andrée, and (since nowadays, the telephone having come into general use, a decorative ritual of polite phrases has grown up around it, as around the tea tables of the past) added: “It has been a great pleasure to hear your voice.”

I might have said the same, and more truthfully than Andrée, for I had been deeply touched by the sound of her voice, having never before noticed that it was so different from the voices of other people. Then I recalled other voices still, women’s voices especially, some of them rendered slow by the precision of a question and by mental concentration, others made breathless, even silenced at moments, by the lyrical flow of what the speakers were relating; I recalled one by one the voices of all the girls whom I had known at Balbec, then Gilberte’s voice, then my grandmother’s, then Mme de Guermantes’s; I found them all dissimilar,

molded in a language peculiar to each of the speakers, each playing on a different instrument, and I said to myself how meager must be the concert performed in Paradise by the three or four angel musicians of the old painters, when I saw mount to the throne of God, by tens, by hundreds, by thousands, the harmonious and multi-sonorous salutation of all the Voices. I did not leave the telephone without thanking in a few propitiatory words the One who reigns over the speed of sounds for having kindly employed on behalf of my humble words a power that made them a hundred times more rapid than thunder. But my thanksgiving received no other response than that of being cut off.

When Albertine returned to my room, she was wearing a black satin dress that had the effect of making her seem paler, of turning her into the pallid, ardent Parisian, etiolated by lack of fresh air, by the atmosphere of crowds and perhaps by habits of vice, and whose eyes seemed more anxious because they were not brightened by any color in her cheeks.

“Guess,” I said to her, “to whom I’ve just been talking on the telephone. Andrée!”

“Andrée?” exclaimed Albertine in a loud, astonished, emotional tone, which so simple a piece of news seemed hardly to require. “I hope she remembered to tell you that we met Mme Verdurin the other day.”

“Mme Verdurin? I don’t remember,” I replied, as though I were thinking of something else, so as to appear indifferent to this meeting and not to betray Andrée, who had told me where Albertine was going the next day. But how could I tell that Andrée was not herself betraying me and would not tell Albertine tomorrow that I had asked her to prevent her at all costs from going to the Verdurins’, and whether she had not already revealed to her that I had at several times made similar recommendations. She had assured me that she had never repeated anything, but the value of this assertion was counterbalanced in my mind by the impression that for some time past Albertine’s face had ceased to show the confidence that she had for so long placed in me.

Suffering, when we are in love, ceases now and then for a moment, but only to resume in a different form. We weep to see her whom we love no longer respond to us with those outbursts of affection, the amorous advances of the early days, we suffer even more when, having lost them with us, she recovers them for the benefit of others; then, from this suffering, we are distracted by a new and still more piercing grief, the

suspicion that she was lying to us about how she spent the previous evening, when she was no doubt unfaithful to us; this suspicion in turn is dispelled, the kindness that our mistress is showing us soothes us, but then a word that we had forgotten comes back to our mind; someone has told us that she was ardent in moments of pleasure, whereas we have always found her calm; we try to picture to ourselves what can have been these frenzies with others, we feel how very little we are to her, we observe an air of ennui, longing, melancholy, while we are talking, we observe like a black sky the unpretentious dresses that she puts on when she is with us, keeping for others the ones with which she used to dazzle us at first. If on the contrary she is affectionate, what joy for a moment! But when we see that little tongue outstretched as though in invitation, we think of those people to whom that invitation has so often been addressed, and that perhaps even here with me, even though Albertine was not thinking of them, it has remained, by force of long habit, an automatic signal. Then the feeling that she is bored with us returns. But suddenly this pain is reduced to nothing when we think of the unknown evil element in her life, of the places impossible to identify where she has been, where she still goes perhaps at the hours when we are not with her, if indeed she is not planning to live there altogether, those places in which she is separated from us, does not belong to us, is happier than when she is with us. Such are the revolving searchlights of jealousy.

Jealousy is moreover a demon that cannot be exorcised, but always returns to assume a new incarnation. Even if we could succeed in exterminating them all, in keeping forever her whom we love, the Spirit of Evil would then adopt another form, more pathetic still, despair at having obtained fidelity only by force, despair at not being loved.

Between Albertine and me there was often the obstacle of a silence based no doubt upon grievances that she kept to herself, because she supposed them to be irremediable. Charming as Albertine was on some evenings, she no longer showed those spontaneous impulses that I remembered at Balbec when she used to say: "How good you are to me all the same!" and her whole heart seemed to spring toward me without the reservation of any of those grievances that she now felt and kept to herself because she supposed them no doubt to be irremediable, impossible to forget, unconfessed, but that set up nevertheless between her and me the significant prudence of her remarks or the interval of an impassable silence.

“And may one be allowed to know why you telephoned Andrée?”

“To ask whether she had any objection to my joining you tomorrow, so that I may pay the Verdurins the call I promised them at La Raspelière.”

“Just as you like. But I warn you, there is an appalling fog this evening, and it’s sure to last through tomorrow. I mention it, because I wouldn’t like you to make yourself ill. Personally, you can imagine how much I’d like you to come with us. However,” she added with a thoughtful air: “I’m not at all sure that I will go to the Verdurins’. They’ve been so kind to me that I ought, really . . . Next to you, they have been nicer to me than anybody, but there are some things about them that I don’t really like. I simply must go to the Bon Marché and the Trois Quartiers¹⁰² and get a white guimpe¹⁰³ to wear with this dress that is really too black.”

To allow Albertine to go by herself into a department store crowded with people perpetually brushing against one, furnished with so many doors that a woman can always say that when she came out she could not find the carriage that was waiting farther along the street, was a thing I was determined never to consent to, but the thought of it made me extremely unhappy. And yet I did not take into account that I ought long ago to have ceased to see Albertine, for she had entered, for me, that lamentable period in which a person disseminated in space and time is no longer a woman, but a series of events on which we can throw no light, a series of insoluble problems, a sea that we absurdly attempt, like Xerxes, to scourge, in order to punish it for what it has engulfed. Once this period has begun, we are perforce vanquished. Happy are they who understand this in time not to prolong unduly a futile, exhausting struggle, hemmed in on every side by the limits of the imagination, a struggle in which jealousy plays so sorry a part that the same man who once upon a time, if the eyes of the woman who was always by his side rested for an instant upon another man, imagined an intrigue, suffered endless torments, resigns himself in time to allowing her to go out by herself, sometimes with the man whom he knows to be her lover, preferring to the unknown this torture that at least he does know! It is a question of the rhythm to be adopted, which afterward one follows from force of habit. Neurotics who could never stay away from a dinner party will afterward take rest cures that never seem to them to last long enough; women who recently were still of easy virtue live in penitence. Jealous lovers who, in order to spy on her whom they loved, cut short their own hours of sleep, deprived themselves of rest, now feeling that her own

desires, the world so vast and so secret, and time, are stronger than they, allow her to go out without them, then to travel, and finally separate from her. Jealousy thus perishes for want of nourishment and has survived so long only by clamoring incessantly for fresh food. I was still a long way from this state.

No doubt Albertine's time belonged to me in more quantities than at Balbec. I was now at liberty to go out with Albertine as often as I chose. As there had recently sprung up all around Paris a number of airfields, which are to airplanes what harbors are to ships, and as ever since the day when, on the way to La Raspelière, that quasi-mythological encounter with an airman, at whose passage overhead my horse had reared, had been to me like a symbol of liberty,¹⁰⁴ I often chose to end our day's excursion—with the ready approval of Albertine, a passionate lover of every form of sport—at one of these airfields. We went there, she and I, attracted by that incessant stir of departure and arrival that gives so much charm to a stroll along the jetty, or merely on the beach, to those who love the sea, and to loitering about an "aviation center" to those who love the sky. At any moment, amid the repose of the machines that lay inert and as though at anchor, we would see one, laboriously pushed by a number of mechanics, as a boat is dragged down over the sand at the bidding of a tourist who wishes to go for an outing on the sea. Then the engine was started, the machine ran along the ground, gathered speed, until finally, all of a sudden, at right angles, it rose slowly, as though immobilized in the ecstasy of a horizontal speed suddenly transformed into a majestic, vertical ascent. Albertine could not contain her joy, and demanded explanations of the mechanics who, now that the machine was in the air, were strolling back to the sheds. The passenger, meanwhile, was covering mile after mile; the huge skiff, on which our eyes remained fixed, was nothing more now in the azure than a barely visible dot, which, however, would gradually recover its solidity, size, volume, when, as the time allowed for the excursion drew to an end, the moment came for landing. And we watched with envy, Albertine and I, as he sprang to earth, the passenger who had gone up like that to enjoy, in those solitary expanses of the open sky, the calm and limpidity of evening. Then, whether from the airfield or from some museum, some church that we had been visiting, we would return home together for dinner. And yet, I did not return home calmed, as I used to be at Balbec by less frequent excursions that I rejoiced to see extend over a whole afternoon and that I

used afterward to contemplate, standing out like clustering flowers from the rest of Albertine's life, as against an empty sky, in front of which we muse pleasantly, without thinking. Albertine's time did not belong to me then in such ample quantities as today. And yet, it had seemed to me then to belong to me much more, because I took into account only—my love rejoicing in them as in the bestowal of a favor—the hours that she spent with me. Now—my jealousy searching anxiously among them for the possibility of a betrayal—it was only those hours that she spent apart from me. And she was looking forward, on the following day, to some such hours. I must choose, either to cease from suffering or to cease from loving. For, just as in the beginning it is formed by desire, so afterward love is kept in existence only by painful anxiety. I felt that part of Albertine's life was escaping me. Love, in painful anxiety as in blissful desire, is the demand for a whole. It is born, it survives only if some part remains for it to conquer. We love only what we do not wholly possess. Albertine was lying when she told me that she probably would not go to the Verdurins', as I was lying when I said that I wished to go there. She was seeking merely to dissuade me from accompanying her, and I, by my abrupt announcement of this plan, which I had no intention of executing, to touch what I felt to be her most sensitive spot, to track down the desire that she was concealing and to force her to admit that my company on the next day would prevent her from satisfying it. She had virtually made this admission by ceasing at once to wish to go to see the Verdurins.

"If you don't want to go to the Verdurins'," I told her, "there is a splendid charity show at the Trocadéro."¹⁰⁵ She listened to my urging her to attend it with a doleful air. I began to be harsh with her as at Balbec, at the time of my first jealousy. Her face reflected a disappointment, and I employed, to reproach my mistress, the same arguments that had been so often advanced against me by my parents when I was little and that had appeared unintelligent and cruel to my misunderstood childhood. "No, in spite of your melancholy air," I said to Albertine, "I cannot feel sorry for you; I would feel sorry for you if you were ill, if you were in trouble, if you had suffered some bereavement; not that you would mind that in the least, I dare say, since you pour out false sentiments over nothing. Anyhow, I don't really care about the sensibility of people who pretend to be so fond of us and are quite incapable of doing us the slightest favor, and whose minds

wander so that they forget to deliver the letter we have entrusted to them, on which our whole future depends.”

These words—a great part of what we say being no more than a recitation from memory—I had heard spoken, all of them, by my mother, who (ever ready to explain to me that we ought not to confuse true sensibility, what the Germans, whose language she greatly admired notwithstanding my father’s horror of their nation, called *Empfindung*, with sentimentality or *Empfinderei*)¹⁰⁶ once, when I was in tears, had gone so far as to tell me that Nero¹⁰⁷ probably suffered from his nerves and was none the better for that. Indeed, like those plants that bifurcate as they grow, side by side with the sensitive boy, which was all that I had been, there was now a man of the opposite sort, full of common sense, of severity toward the morbid sensibility of others, a man resembling what my parents had been to me. No doubt, as each of us is obliged to continue in himself the life of his forebears, the level-headed, cynical man who did not exist in me at the start had joined forces with the sensitive one, and it was natural that I should become in my turn what my parents had been to me. What is more, at the moment when this new me took shape, he found his language ready-made in the memory of the remarks, ironical and scolding, that had been addressed to me, that I must now address to other people, and which came so naturally to my lips, whether I evoked them by mimicry and association of memories, or because the delicate and mysterious enchantments of the reproductive power had traced in me unawares, as upon the leaf of a plant, the same intonations, the same gestures, the same attitudes as had been adopted by the people from whom I sprang. For sometimes, as I was playing the sage when talking to Albertine, I seemed to be hearing my grandmother. Moreover, had it not occurred to my mother (so many obscure unconscious currents caused everything in me, down to the tiniest movements of my fingers even, to follow the same cycles as those of my parents) to imagine that it was my father at the door, so similar was my knock to his. On the other hand the coupling of contrary elements is the law of life, the principle of fertilization, and, as we will see, the cause of many misfortunes. As a general rule, we detest what resembles ourselves, and our own faults, when observed in another person, exasperate us. How much the more does a man who has passed the age at which we instinctively display them, a man who, for example, has gone through the most burning moments with an icy countenance, execrate those same faults, if it is another man,

younger or more naïve or stupider, who is displaying them! There are sensitive people to whom merely to see in other people's eyes the tears that they themselves have held back is exasperating. It is because the similarity is too great that, in spite of family affection, and sometimes all the more the greater the affection is, division reigns in families. Possibly in myself, and in many others, the second man that I had become was simply another aspect of the first, excitable and sensitive in his own affairs, a sage Mentor¹⁰⁸ to other people. Perhaps it was so also with my parents according to whether they were considered in relation to me or in themselves. In the case of my grandmother and mother it was as clear as daylight that their severity toward me was deliberate on their part and indeed cost them dearly, but was my father's coldness perhaps only an external aspect of his sensibility? For it was perhaps the human truth of this twofold aspect, the aspect of the inner life, the aspect of social relations, that was expressed in these words that seemed to me at the time as false in their content as they were commonplace in form, when someone remarked, speaking of my father: "Beneath his icy chill, he conceals an extraordinary sensibility; what is really wrong with him is that he is ashamed of his own feelings." Did it not, after all, conceal incessant secret storms, that calm (interspersed if need be with sententious reflections, irony at the maladroit exhibitions of sensibility) which was his, but which now I too was affecting in my relations with everybody and never laid aside in certain circumstances of my relations with Albertine?

I really believe that I came near that day to making up my mind to break up with her and to leave for Venice. What bound me anew in my chains had to do with Normandy, not that she showed any inclination to go to that region where I had been jealous of her (for it was my good fortune that her plans never impinged upon the painful spots in my memory), but because when I had said to her: "It is just as though I were to speak to you of your aunt's friend who lived at Infreville," she replied angrily, delighted—like everyone in a discussion, who is eager to muster as many arguments as possible on his side—to show me that I was in the wrong and herself in the right: "But my aunt never knew anybody at Infreville, and I have never been near the place." She had forgotten the lie that she had told me one afternoon about the susceptible lady with whom she simply must take tea, even if by going to visit this lady she were to forfeit my friendship and shorten her own life.¹⁰⁹ I did not remind her of her lie. But it appalled me.

And once again I postponed our rupture to another day. A person has no need of sincerity, nor even of skill in lying, in order to be loved. I here call love reciprocal torture. I saw nothing reprehensible that evening in speaking to her as my grandmother—that mirror of perfection—used to speak to me, nor, when I told her that I would escort her to the Verdurins', in having adopted my father's abrupt manner, who would never inform us of any decision except in the manner calculated to cause us the maximum of agitation, out of all proportion to the decision itself. So that it was easy for him to call us absurd for appearing so distressed by so small a matter, our distress corresponding in reality to the disturbance that he had aroused in us. And if—like the inflexible wisdom of my grandmother—these arbitrary moods of my father had been passed on to myself to complete the sensitive nature to which they had so long remained alien, and, throughout my whole childhood, had caused so much suffering, that sensitive nature informed them very exactly as to the points at which they could most effectively take aim: there is no better informer than a reformed thief, or a subject of the nation we are fighting. In certain untruthful families, a brother who has come to call upon his brother without any apparent reason and asks him, quite casually, on the doorstep, as he is going away, for some information to which he does not even appear to listen, indicates thereby to his brother that this information was the main object of his visit, for the brother is quite familiar with that air of detachment, those words uttered as though in parentheses and at the last moment, having frequently had recourse to them himself. There are also pathological families, kindred sensibilities, fraternal temperaments, initiated into that mute language that enables the members of a family to understand one another without speaking. And who can be more nerve-racking than a neurotic? Besides, my conduct, in these cases, may have had a more general, a more profound cause. I mean that in those brief but inevitable moments, when we detest someone whom we love—moments that last sometimes for a whole lifetime in the case of people whom we do not love—we do not wish to appear good, so as not to be pitied, but at once as wicked and as happy as possible so that our happiness may be truly hateful and may ulcerate the soul of the occasional or permanent enemy. To how many people have I not untruthfully maligned myself, simply in order that my “successes” might seem to them immoral and make them all the more angry! The proper thing to do would be to take the opposite course, to show without arrogance that we have generous

feelings, instead of taking such pains to hide them. And it would be easy if we were able never to hate, to love all the time. For then we would be so happy to say only the things that can make other people happy, melt their hearts, make them love us.

To be sure, I felt some remorse at being so irritating to Albertine and said to myself: "If I did not love her, she would be more grateful to me, for I would not be mean to her; but no, it would be the same in the end, for I would also be less nice." And I might, in order to justify myself, have told her that I loved her. But the avowal of that love, apart from the fact that it could not have told Albertine anything new, would perhaps have made her colder toward me than the harshness and deceit for which love was the sole excuse. To be harsh and deceitful to the person whom we love is so natural! If the interest that we show in other people does not prevent us from being kind to them and complying with their wishes, then our interest is not sincere. Others leave us indifferent, and indifference does not prompt us to be unkind.

The evening was passing. Before Albertine went to bed, there was no time to lose if we wished to make peace, to renew our embraces. Neither of us had yet taken the initiative.

Sensing that she was angry with me anyway, I took advantage of her anger to mention Esther Levy. "Bloch tells me" (this was untrue) "that you are a great friend of his cousin Esther."

"I wouldn't know her if I saw her," said Albertine with a vague air.

"I have seen her photograph," I continued angrily. I did not look at Albertine as I said this, so that I did not see her expression, which would have been her sole reply, for she said nothing.

It was no longer the peace of my mother's kiss at Combray¹¹⁰ that I felt when I was with Albertine on these evenings, but, on the contrary, the anguish of those on which my mother scarcely bade me goodnight, or even did not come up at all to my room, whether because she was angry with me or was kept downstairs by guests. This anguish, not merely its transposition into love, no, this anguish itself that had at one time specialized in love, which had been allocated to love alone when the division, the distribution of the passions took effect, seemed now to be extending again to them all, become indivisible again as in my childhood, as though all my sentiments that trembled at the thought of my not being able to keep Albertine by my bedside, at once as a mistress, a sister, a daughter; as a mother too, of whose

regular goodnight kiss I was beginning again to feel the puerile need, had begun to coalesce, to unify in the premature evening of my life that seemed fated to be as short as a day in winter. But if I felt the anguish of my childhood, the different person that now made me feel it, the difference of the sentiment that it inspired in me, the very transformation in my character, made it impossible for me to demand the soothing of that anguish from Albertine as in the old days from my mother. I could no longer say: "I am unhappy." I confined myself, with a heavy heart, to speaking of unimportant things that afforded me no progress toward a happy solution. I waded knee-deep in painful platitudes. And with that intellectual egoism that, if only some insignificant fact has a bearing upon our love, makes us pay great respect to the person who has discovered it, as fortuitously perhaps as the fortune-teller who has foretold some trivial event that has afterward come to pass, I came near to regarding Françoise as more inspired than Bergotte and Elstir because she had said to me at Balbec: "That girl will give you nothing but trouble."

Every minute brought me nearer to Albertine's goodnight, which she finally said. But that evening her kiss, from which she herself was absent, as was I, left me so anxious that, with a throbbing heart, I watched her make her way to the door, thinking: "If I am to find a pretext for calling her back, keeping her here, making peace with her, I must make haste; only a few steps and she will be out of the room, only two, now one, she is turning the handle; she is opening the door, it is too late, she has shut it behind her!" Perhaps it was not too late, all the same. As in the old days at Combray when my mother had left me without soothing me with her kiss, I wanted to dart in pursuit of Albertine, I felt that there would be no peace for me until I had seen her again, that seeing her again was to be something immense, which it had never yet been, and that—if I did not succeed by my own efforts in ridding myself of this sadness—I might perhaps acquire the shameful habit of going to beg from Albertine. I sprang out of bed when she was already in her room, I paced up and down the corridor, hoping that she would come out of her room and call me; I stood still outside her door for fear of failing to hear some faint summons, I returned for a moment to my own room to see whether my mistress had not by some lucky chance forgotten her handkerchief, her bag, something that I might have appeared to be afraid of her wanting during the night, and that would have given me an excuse for going to her room. No, nothing. I returned to my station

outside her door, but the crack beneath it no longer showed any light. Albertine had put out the light, she was in bed, I remained there motionless, hoping for some lucky accident, but none occurred; and long afterward, frozen, I returned to crawl into my own bed and cried all night long.

But there were certain evenings also when I had recourse to a ruse that won me Albertine's kiss. Knowing how quickly sleep came to her as soon as she lay down (she knew it also, for, instinctively, before lying down, she would take off her slippers, which I had given her, and her ring that she placed by the bedside, as she did in her own room when she went to bed), knowing how heavy her sleep was, how affectionate her awakening, I would plead the excuse of going to look for something and make her lie down on my bed. When I returned to the room she was asleep, and I saw before me the other woman that she became whenever one saw her full face. But very soon her personality changed, for I lay down by her side and recaptured her again in profile. I could place my hand in her hand, on her shoulder, on her cheek. Albertine continued to sleep. I might take her head, lift it toward me, press it to my lips, put her arms around my neck, she continued to sleep like a watch that does not stop, like an animal that goes on living whatever position you assign to it, like a climbing plant, a convolvulus,¹¹¹ which continues to thrust out its tendrils to whatever support you give it. Only her breathing was altered by every touch of my fingers, as though she had been an instrument on which I was playing and from which I extracted modulations by drawing from first one, then another of its strings different notes. My jealousy grew calm, for I felt that Albertine had become a creature that breathes, that is nothing else besides, as was indicated by that regular breathing in which is expressed that pure physiological function that, wholly fluid, does not have the solidity either of speech or of silence and, in its ignorance of all evil, her breath—drawn (it seemed) rather from a hollowed reed than from a human being, was truly paradisaical to me who, at these moments, felt Albertine to be withdrawn from everything, not only materially but morally—was the pure song of the angels. And yet in that breathing, I said to myself all of a sudden that perhaps many names of people borne on the stream of memory must be playing.

Sometimes indeed to that music the human voice was added. Albertine uttered a few words. How I longed to catch their meaning! It happened that the name of a person of whom we had been speaking and who had aroused

my jealousy came to her lips, but without making me unhappy, for the memory that it brought with it seemed to be only that of the conversations that she had had with me on the subject. One evening, however, when with her eyes still shut she awoke, she said tenderly, addressing me: "Andrée." I concealed my emotion. "You are dreaming, I am not Andrée," I said to her, smiling. She smiled also. "Of course not, I wanted to ask you what Andrée was saying to you earlier." "I would have supposed that you were used to lying like this by her side." "Oh no, never," she said. Only, before making this reply, she had hidden her face for a moment in her hands. Her silences were merely veils, her surface affection merely kept beneath the surface countless memories that would have rent my heart, her life was full of those incidents the mocking, bantering account of which forms our daily gossip at the expense of other people, people who do not matter, but which, so long as such a person remains lost in the depths of our heart, seem to us so precious a revelation of her life that, for the privilege of exploring that subterranean world, we would gladly sacrifice our own. Then her sleep appeared to me a marvelous and magic world in which at certain moments there rises from the depths of the barely translucent element the avowal of a secret that we will not understand. But as a rule, when Albertine was asleep, she seemed to have recaptured her innocence. In the attitude that I had imposed upon her, but which in her sleep she had speedily made her own, she looked as though she were trusting herself to me! Her face had lost any expression of cunning or vulgarity, and between herself and me, toward whom she was raising her arm, upon whom her hand was resting, there seemed to be an absolute surrender, an indissoluble attachment. Her sleep moreover did not separate her from me and allowed her to retain her consciousness of our affection; its effect was rather to abolish everything else; I embraced her, told her that I was going to take a turn outside, she half-opened her eyes, said to me with an air of astonishment—indeed the hour was late: "But where are you off to, my darling?"—calling me by my given name, and at once fell asleep again. Her sleep was only a sort of obliteration of the rest of her life, a continuous silence over which from time to time would pass in their flight familiar words of tenderness. By putting these words together, you would have arrived at the unalloyed conversation, the secret intimacy of a pure love. This calm slumber delighted me, as a mother is delighted, reckoning it among his virtues, by the sound sleep of her child. And her sleep was indeed that of a child. Her

waking also, and so natural, so loving, before she even knew where she was, that I sometimes asked myself with terror whether she had been in the habit, before coming to live with me, of not sleeping by herself but of finding, when she opened her eyes, someone lying by her side. But her childish grace was more striking. Like a mother again, I marveled that she should always awake in so good a humor. After a few moments she regained consciousness, uttered charming words, unconnected with one another, mere twitterings. By a sort of reciprocal exchange, her neck, which as a rule passed unnoticed, now almost startlingly beautiful, had acquired the immense importance that her eyes, by being closed in sleep, had lost, her eyes, my regular interlocutors to which I could no longer address myself after the lids had closed over them. Just as the closed lids impart an innocent, grave beauty to the face by suppressing all that the eyes express only too plainly, there was in the words, not devoid of meaning, but interrupted by moments of silence, which Albertine uttered as she awoke, a pure beauty that is not at every moment sullied, as is conversation, by habits of speech, commonplaces, traces of defects. Moreover, when I had decided to wake Albertine, I had been able to do so without fear, I knew that her awakening would bear no relation to the evening that we had spent together but would emerge from her sleep as morning emerges from night. As soon as she had begun to open her eyes with a smile, she had offered me her lips, and before she had even uttered a word, I had tasted their fresh savor, as soothing as that of a garden still silent before the break of day.

On the day after that evening¹¹² when Albertine had told me that she would perhaps be going, then that she would not be going to see the Verdurins, I awoke early, and, while I was still half asleep, my joy informed me that there was, interpolated in the winter, a day of spring. Outside, popular themes skillfully transposed for various instruments, from the horn of the mender of porcelain, or the trumpet of the chair weaver, to the flute of the goatherd who seemed, on a fine morning, to be a Sicilian shepherd, were lightly orchestrating the matutinal air, with an “Overture for a Public Holiday.”¹¹³ Our hearing, that delightful sense, brings us the company of the street, every line of which it traces for us, sketches all the figures that pass along it, showing us their colors. The iron shutters of the baker’s shop, of the dairy, which had been lowered last night over every possibility of feminine bliss, were rising now, like the canvas of a ship that is preparing to set sail, crossing the transparent sea, over a vision of young female

assistants. This sound of the iron shutters being raised would perhaps have been my sole pleasure in a different part of the town. In this quarter a hundred other sounds contributed to my joy, of which I would not have lost a single one by remaining too long asleep. It is the magic charm of the old aristocratic quarters that they are at the same time plebeian. Just as, sometimes, cathedrals used to have them within a stone's throw of their portals (which have even preserved the name, like the portal of the cathedral of Rouen called the Booksellers', because these latter used to expose their merchandise in the open air against its walls), so various minor trades, but peripatetic, used to pass in front of the noble Hôtel de Guermantes, and made one think at times of the ecclesiastical France of long ago. For the calls they launched at the little houses on either side had, with rare exceptions, nothing of a song. They differed from song as much as the declamation—barely colored by imperceptible modulations—of *Boris Godunov*¹¹⁴ and *Pelléas*;¹¹⁵ but on the other hand recalled the psalmody of a priest chanting his office of which these street scenes are but the good-humored, secular, and yet half-liturgical counterpart. Never had I so delighted in them as since Albertine had come to live with me; they seemed to me a joyous signal of her awakening, and by interesting me in the life of the world outside made me all the more conscious of the soothing virtue of a beloved presence, as constant as I could wish. Several of the foodstuffs cried in the street, which personally I detested, were greatly to Albertine's liking, so much so that Françoise used to send her young footman out to buy them, slightly humiliated perhaps at finding himself mingled with the plebeian crowd. Very distinct in this peaceful quarter (where the noise was no longer a cause of lamentation to Françoise and had become a source of pleasure to myself), there came to me, each with its different modulation, recitatives declaimed by those humble folk as they would be in the music—so entirely popular—of *Boris*, where an initial intonation is barely altered by the inflection of one note resting upon another, the music of the crowd that is more a language than a music. It was "*Ah! le bigorneau, deux sous le bigorneau*,"¹¹⁶ which brought people running to the cornets in which were sold those awful little shellfish, which, if Albertine had not been there, would have disgusted me, just as the snails disgusted me that I heard cried for sale at the same hour. Here again it was of the barely lyrical declamation of Mussorgsky that the vendor reminded me, but not of it alone. For after

having almost “spoken”: “*Les escargots, ils sont frais, ils sont beaux,*”¹¹⁷ it was with the vague sadness of Maeterlinck, transposed into music by Debussy, that the snail vendor, in one of those dolorous finales in which the composer of *Pelléas* shows his kinship with Rameau: “If vanquished I must be, is it for thee to be my vanquisher?”¹¹⁸ added with a singsong melancholy: “*On les vend six sous la douzaine . . .*”¹¹⁹

I have always found it difficult to understand why these perfectly simple words were sighed in a tone so far from appropriate, mysterious, like the secret that makes everyone look sad in the old palace to which Mélisande has not succeeded in bringing joy, and profound as one of the thoughts of the aged Arkel, who seeks to utter, in the simplest words, the whole lore of wisdom and destiny.¹²⁰ The very notes upon which rises with an increasing sweetness the voice of the old King of Allemonde or that of Golaud, to say: “*On ne sait pas ce qu’il y a ici, cela peut paraître étrange. Il n’y a peut-être pas d’événements inutiles,*”¹²¹ or else: “*Il ne faut pas s’effrayer,*”¹²² *C’était un pauvre petit être comme tout le monde,*”¹²³ were those that served the snail vendor to resume, in an endless cantilena: “*On les vend six sous la douzaine . . .*” But this metaphysical lamentation did not have time to expire upon the shore of the infinite, it was interrupted by a shrill trumpet. This time, it was no question of victuals, the words of the libretto were: “*Tond les chiens, coupe les chats, les queues et les oreilles.*”¹²⁴

It was true that the fantasy, the wit of each male or female vendor frequently introduced variations into the words of all these chants that I used to hear from my bed. And yet a ritual suspension interposing a silence in the middle of a word, especially when it was repeated a second time, constantly reminded me of old churches. In his little cart drawn by a donkey that he stopped in front of each house before entering the courtyard, the old-clothes man, brandishing a whip, psalmodied: “*Habits, marchand d’habits, ha . . . bits*”¹²⁵ with the same pause between the last two syllables as if he had been intoning in plainchant: “*Per omnia saecula saeculo . . . rum*”¹²⁶ or “*requiescat in pa . . . ce*”¹²⁷ although he had no reason to believe in the immortality of his clothes, nor did he offer them as shrouds for the supreme repose in peace. And similarly, as the motives were beginning, even at this early hour, to intermingle, a vendor of fruits and vegetables, pushing her little handcart, was using for her litany the Gregorian division:

À la tendresse, à la verdure,se,
Artichauts tendres et beaux,
Arti . . . chauts.¹²⁸

although she had probably never heard of the antiphony,¹²⁹ or of the seven tones that symbolize the four sciences of the quadrivium and the three of the trivium.¹³⁰

Drawing from a penny whistle, from a bagpipe, airs of his own southern country whose sunlight harmonized well with these fine days, a man in a smock, carrying a bullwhip in his hand and wearing a Basque béret on his head, stopped before each house in turn. It was the goatherd with two dogs driving before him his string of goats. As he came from a distance, he arrived fairly late in our quarter; and the women came running out with bowls to receive the milk that was to give strength to their little ones. But with the Pyrenean airs of this good shepherd was now blended the bell of the grinder, who cried: “*Couteaux, ciseaux, rasoirs.*”¹³¹ With him the saw-setter was unable to compete, for, lacking an instrument, he had to be content with calling: “*Avez-vous des scies à repasser, v’là le repasseur,*”¹³² while in a gayer mood the tinker, after enumerating the pots, pans, and everything else that he repaired, intoned the refrain:

Tam, tam, tam,
C’est moi qui rétame
Même le macadam,
C’est moi qui mets des fonds partout,
Qui bouche tous les trous,
Trou, trou, trou;¹³³

and young Italians carrying big iron boxes painted red, upon which the numbers—winning and losing—were marked, and swinging their noisemakers, gave the invitation: “*Amusez-vous, mesdames, v’là le plaisir.*”¹³⁴

Françoise brought me *Le Figaro*.¹³⁵ A glance was sufficient to show me that my article had not yet appeared. She told me that Albertine had asked whether she might come to my room and sent word that she had quite given up the idea of calling on the Verdurins, and had decided to go, as I had advised her, to the “special” matinée at the Trocadéro—what nowadays would be called, though with considerably less significance, a “gala” matinée—after a short ride that she had promised to take with Andrée. Now that I knew that she had renounced her desire, possibly evil, to go and see

Mme Verdurin, I said with a laugh: “Tell her to come in,” and told myself that she might go where she chose and that it was all the same to me. I knew that by the end of the afternoon, when dusk began to fall, I would probably be a different man, moping, attaching to every one of Albertine’s movements an importance that they did not possess at this morning hour when the weather was so fine. For my insouciance was accompanied by a clear notion of its cause but was in no way modified by it.

“Françoise assured me that you were awake and that I would not be disturbing you,” said Albertine as she entered the room. And since next to making me catch cold by opening the window at the wrong moment, what Albertine most dreaded was to come into my room when I was asleep: “I hope I have not done anything wrong,” she went on. “I was afraid you would say to me:

Quel mortel insolent vient chercher le trépas?^{[136](#)}

and she laughed that laugh that I always found so disturbing. I replied in the same bantering vein:

Est-ce pour vous qu’est fait cet ordre si sévère?^{[137](#)}

And, lest she should ever venture to break it, added: “Although I would be furious if you did wake me.”

“I know, I know, don’t be frightened,” said Albertine.

And, to reduce the tension, I went on, still enacting the scene from *Esther* with her, while in the street below the cries continued, drowned by our conversation:

Je ne trouve qu’en vous je ne sais quelle grâce

Qui me charme toujours et jamais ne me lasse^{[138](#)}

(and to myself I thought: “yes, she does tire me very often”). And remembering what she had said to me the night before, as I thanked her extravagantly for having given up the Verdurins, so that another time she would obey me similarly with regard to something else, I said: “Albertine, you distrust me, the one who loves you, and you place your trust in other people who do not love you” (as though it were not natural to distrust the people who love us and who alone have an interest in lying to us in order to find out things, to hinder us), and added these mendacious words: “You don’t really believe that I love you, which is amusing. As a matter of fact, I don’t *adore* you.” She lied in her turn when she told me that she trusted

nobody but me and then became sincere when she assured me that she knew very well that I loved her. But this affirmation did not seem to imply that she did not believe me to be a liar and spying on her. And she seemed to forgive me as though she had seen these defects to be the agonizing consequence of a great love or as though she had felt herself to be less good.

“I beg of you, my darling girl, no more of that trick riding¹³⁹ you were practicing the other day. Just think, Albertine, if you were to have an accident!” Of course, I did not wish her any harm. But what a pleasure it would be if, with her horses, she should take it into her head to ride off somewhere, wherever she chose, and never to return again to my house! How it would simplify everything, that she should go and live happily somewhere else, I did not even wish to know where!

“Oh! I know you wouldn’t survive me for more than forty-eight hours; you would kill yourself.”

Thus we exchanged lying speeches. But a truth more profound than the one that we would utter if we were sincere may sometimes be expressed and announced by another channel than that of sincerity.

“You don’t mind all that noise from outside?” she asked me, “Personally, I adore it. But you’re such a light sleeper anyhow.”¹⁴⁰

I was on the contrary sometimes a very heavy sleeper (as I have already said, but I am obliged to repeat it in view of what follows), especially when I did not begin to sleep until the morning. As this kind of sleep is—on an average—four times as refreshing, it seems to the awakened sleeper to have lasted four times as long, when it has really been four times as short. A splendid, sixteenfold error in multiplication that gives so much beauty to our awakening and makes life begin again on a different scale, like those great changes of rhythm that, in music, mean that in an andante, a quaver has the same duration as a minim in a prestissimo, and which are unknown in our waking state. There, life is almost always the same, whence the disappointments of travel. It may seem indeed that our dreams are composed of the coarsest stuff of life, but that stuff is treated, kneaded so thoroughly, with a protraction due to the fact that none of the temporal limitations of the waking state is there to prevent it from spinning itself out to heights so vast that we fail to recognize it. On the mornings after this good fortune had befallen me, after the sponge of sleep had wiped from my brain the signs of everyday occupations that are traced upon it as upon a

blackboard, I was obliged to bring my memory back to life; by the exercise of our will we can recapture what the amnesia of sleep or of a stroke has made us forget and that gradually returns to us as our eyes open or our paralysis disappears. I had lived through so many hours in a few minutes that, wishing to address Françoise, for whom I had rung, in language that corresponded to the facts of real life and was regulated by the clock, I was obliged to exert all my inner power of compression in order not to say: "Well, Françoise, here we are at five o'clock in the evening and I haven't set eyes on you since yesterday afternoon." And seeking to dispel my dreams, giving them the lie and lying to myself as well, I said boldly, compelling myself with all my might to silence, the direct opposite: "Françoise, it must be at least ten o'clock!" I did not even say ten o'clock in the morning, but simply ten, so that this incredible hour might appear to be uttered in a more natural tone. And yet to say these words, instead of those that continued to run in the mind of the half-awakened sleeper that I still was, demanded the same effort of equilibrium that a man requires when he jumps out of a moving train and runs for some yards along the platform, if he is to avoid falling. He runs for a moment because the environment that he has just left was one animated by great velocity, and utterly unlike the inert soil upon which his feet find it difficult to keep their balance. Because the dream world is not the waking world, it does not follow that the waking world is less real, far from it. In the world of sleep, our perceptions are so overcharged, each of them increased by a counterpart that doubles its bulk and blinds it to no purpose, that we are not able even to distinguish what is happening in the bewilderment of awakening; was it Françoise who had come to me, or I who, tired of calling her, went to her? Silence at that moment was the only way not to reveal anything, as at the moment when we are brought before a judge cognizant of all the charges against us, when we have not been informed of them ourselves. Was it Françoise who had come, was it I who had summoned her? Was it not, indeed, Françoise who had been asleep and I who had just awakened her? Nay more, was not Françoise enclosed in my breast, for the distinction between persons and their interaction barely exists in that murky obscurity in which reality is as little translucent as in the body of a porcupine, and our all but nonexistent perception may perhaps furnish an idea of the perception of certain animals? Besides, in the limpid state of unreason that precedes these heavy slumbers, if fragments of wisdom float there luminously, if the names of

Taine¹⁴¹ and George Eliot¹⁴² are not unknown there, the waking life does still retain the superiority, inasmuch as it is possible to continue it every morning, whereas it is not possible to continue the dream life every night. But perhaps there are other worlds more real than the waking world. Even it we have seen transformed by every revolution in the arts, and still more, at the same time, by the degree of proficiency and culture that distinguishes an artist from an ignorant fool.

And often an extra hour of sleep is an attack of paralysis after which we must recover the use of our limbs, learn to speak. Our willpower would not be adequate for this task. We have slept too long, we no longer exist. Our waking is barely felt, mechanically and without consciousness, as a water pipe might feel the turning off of a tap. A life more inanimate than that of the jellyfish follows, in which we could equally well believe that we had been drawn up from the depths of the sea or released from prison, were we but capable of thinking anything at all. But then from the highest heaven the goddess Mnemotechnia¹⁴³ bends down and holds out to us in the formula “the habit of ringing for our café au lait” the hope of resurrection. However, the instantaneous gift of memory is not always so simple. Often we have before us, in those first minutes in which we allow ourself to slip into the waking state, a variety of different realities among which we imagine that we can choose as from a pack of cards. It is Friday morning and we have just returned from our walk, or else it is teatime by the sea. The idea of sleep and that we are lying in bed and in our nightshirt is often the last that occurs to us. Our resurrection is not effected at once; we think that we have rung the bell, we have not done so, we utter senseless remarks. Movement alone restores our thought, and when we have actually pressed the electric button we are able to say slowly but distinctly: “It must be at least ten o’clock, Françoise, bring me my café au lait.”

Oh, the miracle! Françoise could have had no suspicion of the sea of unreality in which I was still wholly immersed and through which I had had the energy to make my strange question pass. Her answer was: “It is ten past ten,” which made me appear rational and enabled me not to let her perceive the bizarre conversations by which I had been interminably lulled (on days when it was not a mountain of nonexistence that had crushed all life out of me). By strength of will, I had reintegrated myself into reality. I was still enjoying the last shreds of sleep, that is to say of the only invention, the only novelty that exists in storytelling, since none of our

narrations in the waking state, even though they be embellished with literary graces, admit those mysterious differences from which beauty derives. It is easy to speak of the beauty created by opium. But to a man who is accustomed to sleeping only with the aid of drugs, an unexpected hour of natural sleep will reveal the vast, matutinal expanse of a landscape as mysterious and more refreshing. By varying the hour, the place where we go to sleep, by wooing sleep in an artificial manner, or on the contrary by returning for once to natural sleep—the strangest kind of all to whoever is in the habit of putting himself to sleep with soporifics—we succeed in producing a thousand times as many varieties of sleep as a gardener could produce of carnations or roses. Gardeners produce flowers that are delicious dreams, and others too that are like nightmares. When I fell asleep in a certain way, I used to wake up shivering, thinking that I had caught the measles, or, what was far more painful, that my grandmother (to whom I never gave a thought now) was hurt because I had laughed at her that day when, at Balbec, in the belief that she was about to die, she had wished me to have a photograph of her.¹⁴⁴ At once, although I was awake, I felt that I must go and explain to her that she had misunderstood me. But, already, my bodily warmth was returning. The diagnosis of measles was set aside, and my grandmother became so remote that she no longer made my heart ache.

Sometimes over these different kinds of sleep there fell a sudden darkness. I was afraid to continue my walk along an entirely unlighted avenue, where I could hear the footsteps of prowlers. Suddenly a dispute broke out between a policeman and one of those women whom one often saw driving hackney carriages and mistook at a distance for young coachmen. Upon her box among the shadows I could not see her, but she was speaking, and in her voice I could read the perfections of her face and the youthfulness of her body. I strode toward her, in the darkness, to get into her carriage before she drove off. It was a long way. Fortunately, her dispute with the policeman continued. I overtook the carriage, which was still drawn up. This part of the avenue was lighted by streetlamps. The driver became visible. She was indeed a woman, but old, tall, and corpulent, with white hair tumbling beneath her cap, and a red birthmark on her face. I walked past her, thinking: “Is this what happens to the youth of women? Those whom we have met in the past, if suddenly we desire to see them again, have they become old? Is the young woman whom we desire like a character on the stage, when, unable to secure the actress who created the

part, the management is obliged to entrust it to a new star? But then it is no longer the same.”

Then a feeling of sadness overcame me. We have thus in our sleep numerous Pities, like the “Pietà” of the Renaissance, but not, like them, wrought in marble, being, rather, unsubstantial. They have their purpose, however, which is to make us remember a certain outlook upon things, more tender, more humane, which we are too apt to forget in the common sense, frigid, sometimes full of hostility, of the waking state. Thus I was reminded of the vow that I had made at Balbec that I would always treat Françoise with compassion. And for the whole of that morning at least I would manage to compel myself not to be irritated by Françoise’s quarrels with the butler, to be gentle with Françoise, to whom the others showed so little kindness. For that morning only, and I would have to try to frame a code that was a little more permanent; for, just as nations are not governed for any length of time by a policy of pure sentiment, so men are not governed by the memory of their dreams. Already this dream was beginning to fade away. In attempting to recall it in order to portray it I made it fade all the faster. My eyelids were no longer so firmly sealed over my eyes. If I tried to reconstruct my dream, they opened completely. At every moment we must choose between health and sanity on the one hand, and spiritual pleasures on the other. I have always taken the cowardly part of choosing the former. Moreover, the perilous power that I was renouncing was even more perilous than we suppose. Pities, dreams, do not fly away unaccompanied. When we alter thus the conditions in which we go to sleep, it is not our dreams alone that fade, but, for days on end, for years it may be, the faculty not merely of dreaming but of going to sleep. Sleep is divine but by no means stable; the slightest shock makes it volatile. A friend to habit, it is kept every night in its appointed place by habit, more fixed than itself, which protects it from all disruption. But if we displace it, if it is no longer subjugated, it melts away like a vapor. It is like youth and love, never to be recaptured.

In these various forms of sleep, as likewise in music, it was the lengthening or shortening of the interval that created beauty. I enjoyed this beauty, but, on the other hand, I had lost in my sleep, however brief, a good number of the street cries that render perceptible to us the peripatetic life of the tradesmen, the victualers of Paris. And so, as a habit (without, alas, foreseeing the drama in which these late awakenings and the Draconian,

Medo-Persian laws of a Racinian Ahasuerus¹⁴⁵ were presently to involve me), I made an effort to awaken early so as to lose none of these cries. And, more than the pleasure of knowing how fond Albertine was of them and of being out of doors myself without leaving my bed, I heard in them as it were the symbol of the atmosphere of the world outside, of the dangerous stirring life through the midst of which I did not allow her to move except under my tutelage, in an exterior prolongation of her sequestration from which I withdrew her at the hour of my choosing to make her return home to my side.

And so it was with the utmost sincerity that I was able to say in answer to Albertine: “On the contrary, they give me pleasure because I know that you like them.”

*“A la barque, les huîtres, à la barque.”*¹⁴⁶

“Oh, oysters! I’ve been simply longing for some!”

Fortunately, Albertine, partly from inconsistency, partly from docility, quickly forgot the things for which she had been longing, and before I had time to tell her that she would find better oysters at Prunier’s,¹⁴⁷ she wanted in succession all the things that she heard cried by the fish woman: “*A la crevette, à la bonne crevette, j’ai de la raie toute en vie, toute en vie.*”¹⁴⁸ “*Merlans à frire, à frire.*”¹⁴⁹ “*Il arrive le maquereau, maquereau frais, maquereau nouveau.*” “*Voilà le maquereau, mesdames, il est beau le maquereau.*”¹⁵⁰ “*A la moule fraîche et bonne, à la moule!*”¹⁵¹

In spite of myself, the warning: “*Il arrive le maquereau*” made me shudder.¹⁵² But as this warning could not, I felt, apply to our chauffeur, I thought only of the fish of that name, which I detested, and my uneasiness did not last.

“Ah! Mussels,” said Albertine, “I would so like some mussels.”

“My darling! They were fine at Balbec, here they’re not worth eating; besides, I implore you, remember what Cottard told you about mussels.” But my remark was all the more ill-chosen in that the vegetable woman who came next announced a thing that Cottard had forbidden even more strictly:

À la romaine, à la romaine!

*On ne la vend pas, on la promène.*¹⁵³

Albertine consented, however, to sacrifice her lettuces, on the condition that I would promise to buy for her in a few days' time from the woman who cried: "*J'ai de la belle asperge d'Argenteuil, j'ai de la belle asperge.*"¹⁵⁴ A mysterious voice, from which one would have expected some stranger utterance, insinuated: "*Tonneaux, tonneaux!*"¹⁵⁵ We were obliged to remain disappointed that nothing more was being offered us than barrels, for the word was almost entirely drowned by the call: "*Vitri, vitri-er, carreaux cassés, voilà le vitrier, vitri-er,*"¹⁵⁶ a Gregorian division that reminded me less, however, of the liturgy than did the call of the rag vendor, reproducing unwittingly one of those abrupt interruptions of sound in the middle of a prayer, which are common enough in the ritual of the church: "*Praeceptis salutaribus moniti et divina institutione formati audemus dicere,*"¹⁵⁷ says the priest, ending sharply upon *dicere*. Without irreverence, as the pious populace of the Middle Ages used to perform farces and satires on the parvis in front of the church,¹⁵⁸ it is of that *dicere* that this rag vendor makes one think when, after drawling the other words, he utters the final syllable with a sharpness befitting the accentuation laid down by the great pope¹⁵⁹ of the seventh century: "*Chiffons, ferrailles à vendre*"¹⁶⁰ (all this chanted slowly, as are the two syllables that follow, whereas the last concludes more briskly than *dicere*) "*peaux d'la-pins.*"¹⁶¹ "*La Valence, la belle Valence, la fraîche orange.*"¹⁶² The humble leeks even: "*Voilà d'beaux poireaux,*"¹⁶³ the onions: "*Huit sous mon oignon,*"¹⁶⁴ sounded for me like an echo of the rolling waves in which, left to herself, Albertine might have perished, and thus assumed the sweetness of a *Suave mari magno*.¹⁶⁵

Voilà des carottes

*À deux ronds la botte.*¹⁶⁶

"Oh!" exclaimed Albertine, "cabbages, carrots, oranges. All the things I want to eat. Do make Françoise go out and buy some. She will cook us a dish of creamed carrots. Besides, it will be so nice to eat all these things together. It will be all the calls that we hear, transformed into a good dinner . . . Oh, please, ask Françoise to give us instead a skate with black butter. It is so good!"

“My dear girl, of course I will. But don’t wait; if you do, you’ll be asking for all the things that the vegetable women sell.”

“Very well, I’m off, but I never want anything again for our dinners except what we’ve heard cried in the street. It is such fun. And to think that we will have to wait two whole months before we hear: ‘*Haricots verts et tendres, haricots, v’la l’haricot vert.*’ How true that is: *Tendres haricots!*¹⁶⁷ You know I like them as soft as soft, dripping with vinaigrette, you wouldn’t think you were eating them, they melt in the mouth like drops of dew. Oh dear, it’s the same with the little hearts of cream cheese, such a long time to wait: ‘*Bon fromage à la cré, à la cré, bon fromage.*’¹⁶⁸ And the chasselas grapes from Fontainebleau: ‘*J’ai du bon chasselas.*’”¹⁶⁹ And I thought with dismay of all the time that I would have to spend with her before the chasselas were in season. “Listen, I said that I wanted only the things that we had heard cried, but of course I will make exceptions. And so it’s by no means impossible that I may stop by Rebattet’s¹⁷⁰ and order ice cream for the two of us. You will tell me that it’s not yet the season, but I do so want some!”

I was disturbed by this plan of going to Rebattet’s, rendered more certain and more suspicious in my eyes by the words “it’s by no means impossible.” It was the Verdurins’ “at home” day and, ever since Swann had informed them that Rebattet’s was the best place, it was there that they ordered their ice cream and petits fours. “I have no objection to ice cream, my darling Albertine, but let me order it for you, I don’t know myself whether it will be from Poiré-Blanche’s,¹⁷¹ or Rebattet’s, or the Ritz,¹⁷² anyhow I will see.”

“Then you’re going out?” she said with an air of distrust. She always maintained that she would be delighted if I went out more often, but if anything that I said could make her suppose that I would not be staying indoors, her uneasy air made me think that the joy that she would feel in seeing me go out every day was perhaps not altogether sincere.

“I may perhaps go out, perhaps not, you know quite well that I never make plans beforehand. In any case ice cream is not a thing that people hawk in the streets, why do you want some?” And then she replied in words that showed me what a fund of intelligence and latent taste had so quickly developed in her since Balbec, in words akin to those that, she maintained, were due entirely to my influence, to living continually in my company,

words that, however, I would never have spoken, as though I had been in some way forbidden by some unknown authority ever to embellish my conversation with literary forms. Perhaps the future was not destined to be the same for Albertine as for myself. I had almost a presentiment of this when I saw her eagerness to employ in speech images so “written,” which seemed to me to be reserved for another, more sacred use, of which I was still ignorant. She said to me (and I was, in spite of everything, deeply touched, for I thought to myself: Certainly I would not speak as she does, and yet, all the same, but for me she would not be speaking like this, she has been profoundly influenced by me, she cannot therefore help loving me, she is my handiwork): “What I like about these foodstuffs that are hawked is that a thing that we hear like a rhapsody changes its nature when it comes to our table and addresses itself to my palate. As for ice cream (for I hope that you won’t order me one that isn’t cast in one of those old-fashioned molds that have every architectural shape imaginable), whenever I have any temples, churches, obelisks, rocks, it is like an illustrated geography book that I look at first of all and then convert its raspberry or vanilla monuments into coolness in my throat.”

I thought that this was a little too well expressed, but she felt that I thought that it was well expressed, and went on, pausing for a moment when she had brought off her comparison to laugh that beautiful laugh of hers that was so painful to me because it was so voluptuous.

“Oh, mon Dieu, at the Ritz I’m afraid you’ll find Vendôme Columns¹⁷³ of ice cream, chocolate ice cream or raspberry, and then you will need a lot of them so that they may look like votive pillars or pylons erected along an avenue to the glory of Coolness. They make raspberry obelisks too, which will rise up here and there in the burning desert of my thirst, and I will make their pink granite crumble and melt deep down in my throat that they will refresh better than any oasis” (and here the deep laugh broke out, whether from satisfaction at talking so well, or in derision of herself for using such hackneyed images, or, alas, from a physical pleasure at feeling inside herself something so good, so cool, which was tantamount to a sensual pleasure).¹⁷⁴ “Those mountains of ice cream at the Ritz sometimes suggest Monte Rosa,¹⁷⁵ and indeed, if it is a lemon ice cream, I do not object to its not having a monumental shape, its being irregular, abrupt, like one of Elstir’s mountains. It ought not to be too white then, but slightly

yellowish, with that look of dull, dirty snow that Elstir's mountains have. The ice cream need not be at all big, only half an ice cream if you like, those lemon ice creams are still mountains, reduced to a tiny scale, but our imagination restores their dimensions, like those little Japanese dwarf trees that, one knows quite well, are still cedars, oaks, manchineels;¹⁷⁶ so much so that if I arranged a few of them beside a little trickle of water in my room I would have a vast forest stretching down to a river, in which children would be lost. In the same way, at the foot of my yellowish lemon ice cream, I can see quite clearly postilions, travelers, post chaises over which my tongue sets to work to roll down freezing avalanches that will swallow them up" (the cruel delight with which she said this excited my jealousy); "just as," she went on, "I set my lips to work to destroy, pillar after pillar, those Venetian churches of a porphyry that is made with strawberries, and send what I spare of them crashing down upon the worshipers. Yes, all those monuments will pass from their stony state into my insides that throb already with their melting coolness. But, you know, even without ice cream, nothing is so exciting or makes one so thirsty as the advertisements of mineral springs. At Montjouvain, at Mlle Vinteuil's, there was no good confectioner who made ice cream in the neighborhood, but we used to make our own tour of France in the garden by drinking a different sparkling water every day, like Vichy water¹⁷⁷ which, as soon as you pour it out, sends up from the bottom of the glass a white cloud that fades and dissolves if you don't drink it at once." But to hear her speak of Montjouvain was too painful, I cut her short. "I am boring you, goodbye, my dear boy." What a change from Balbec, where I would defy Elstir himself to have been able to divine in Albertine this wealth of poetry, a poetry less strange, less personal than that of Céleste Albaret, for example, who the evening before had come to see me again and having found me in bed, had said to me: "Oh, heavenly majesty deposited on a bed!"

"Why heavenly, Céleste?"

"Oh, because you are unlike anyone else. You're quite mistaken if you think that you are similar in any way to those who travel this vile earth."

"Buy why 'deposited'?"

"Because you don't at all look like a man who's laid down in bed. You are not in the bed. You don't move about. It appears that angels must have descended and placed you there."

Albertine would never have thought of the things that Céleste used to say to me, but love, even when it seems to be nearing its end, is partial. I preferred the illustrated geography book of her ice creams, the somewhat facile charm of which seemed to me a reason for loving Albertine and a proof that I had an influence over her, that she loved me.

As soon as Albertine had gone out, I felt how tiring it was to me, this perpetual presence, insatiable of movement and life, which disturbed my sleep with its movements, made me live in a perpetual chill by her habit of leaving doors open, forced me—in order to find pretexts that would justify me in not accompanying her, without, however, appearing too unwell, and at the same time to see that she was not unaccompanied—to display every day greater ingenuity than Scheherazade.¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, if by a similar ingenuity the Persian storyteller postponed her own death, I was hastening mine. There are thus in life certain situations that are not all created, as was this, by amorous jealousy and a precarious state of health that does not permit us to share the life of a young and active person, situations in which nevertheless the problem of whether to continue a life shared with that person or to return to the separate existence of the past sets itself almost in medical terms: to which of the two sorts of repose ought we sacrifice ourselves (by continuing the daily strain, or by returning to the agonies of separation), to that of the head or of the heart?

In any event, I was very glad that Andrée was to accompany Albertine to the Trocadéro, for certain recent and for that matter entirely trivial incidents had brought it about that while I had still, of course, the same confidence in the chauffeur's honesty, his vigilance, or at least the perspicacity of his vigilance, did not seem to be quite what it had once been. It so happened that, only a short time before, I had sent Albertine alone in his charge to Versailles, and she told me that she had had lunch at the Réservoirs; as the chauffeur had mentioned the restaurant Vatel,¹⁷⁹ the day on which I noticed this contradiction, I found an excuse to go downstairs and speak to him (it was still the same man, whose acquaintance we made at Balbec) while Albertine was dressing.

"You told me that you had had your lunch at the Vatel. Mlle Albertine mentions the Réservoirs. What is the meaning of that?"

The driver replied: "Oh, I said that I had had my lunch at the Vatel, but I don't know where Mademoiselle had hers. She left me as soon as we

reached Versailles to take a fiacre,¹⁸⁰ which she prefers when it isn't a long drive."

Already I was furious at the thought that she had been alone; still, it was only during the time that it took her to have lunch.

"You might surely," I suggested mildly (for I did not wish to appear to be keeping Albertine actually under surveillance, which would have been humiliating to me, and doubly so, for it would have shown that she concealed her activities from me), "have had your lunch, I don't say at her table, but in the same restaurant?"

"But all she told me was to meet her at six o'clock at the place d'Armes.¹⁸¹ I had no orders to call for her after lunch."

"Ah!" I said, making an effort to conceal my dismay. And I returned upstairs. And so it was for more than seven hours on end that Albertine had been alone, left to her own devices. I realized, it is true, that the fiacre had not been merely an expedient whereby to escape from the chauffeur's supervision. In town, Albertine preferred driving in a fiacre, saying that one had a better view, that the air was more pleasant. Nevertheless, she had spent seven hours about which I would never know anything. And I dared not think of the manner in which she must have spent them. I felt that the driver had been extremely maladroit, but my confidence in him was henceforth absolute. For if he had been to the slightest extent in league with Albertine, he would never have acknowledged that he had left her unguarded from eleven o'clock in the morning to six in the afternoon. There could be but one other explanation, and it was absurd, of the chauffeur's admission. This was that some quarrel between Albertine and himself had prompted him, by making a minor disclosure to me, to show my mistress that he was not the sort of man who could be silenced, and that if, after this first gentle warning, she did not toe the line with him, he would just spill the beans. But this explanation was absurd; I would have had first of all to assume a nonexistent quarrel between him and Albertine, and then to label as a consummate blackmailer this good-looking motorist who had always shown himself so affable and obliging. Only two days later, as it happened, I saw that he was more capable than I had for a moment supposed in my frenzy of suspicion of exercising over Albertine a discreet and perspicacious vigilance. For, having managed to take him aside and talk to him of what he had told me about Versailles, I said to him in a casual, friendly tone: "That drive to Versailles that you told me about the other day

was everything that it should be, you behaved perfectly as you always do. But, if I may give you just a little hint, nothing of great importance, I have so much responsibility now that Mme Bontemps has placed her niece under my charge, I am so afraid of accidents, I reproach myself so for not accompanying her, that I prefer that it should be yourself, you who are so safe, so wonderfully skillful, to whom no accident can ever happen, who will drive Mlle Albertine everywhere. Then I need fear nothing.”

The charming apostolic motorist smiled a subtle smile, his hand resting upon the consecration-cross of his steering wheel.¹⁸² Then he uttered these words that (banishing all the anxiety from my heart where its place was at once filled by joy) made me want to fling my arms around his neck:

“Don’t be afraid,” he said to me. “Nothing can happen to her, for, when my wheel is not guiding her, my eye follows her everywhere. At Versailles, I went quietly along and visited the town with her, as you might say. From the Réservoirs she went to the Château,¹⁸³ from the Château to the Trianons,¹⁸⁴ and I following her all the time without appearing to see her, and the astonishing thing is that she never saw me. Oh, even if she had seen me, it wouldn’t have mattered much. It was only natural, as I had the whole day before me with nothing to do, that I should visit the Château too. All the more as Mademoiselle certainly hasn’t failed to notice that I’ve read a bit myself and take an interest in all those old curiosities” (this was true, indeed I would have been surprised if I had learned that he was a friend of Morel, so far more refined was his taste than the violinist’s). “Anyhow, she didn’t see me.”

“She must have met some of her own friends, of course, for she has several at Versailles.”

“No, she was alone all the time.”

“Then people must have stared at her, a girl of such striking appearance, all by herself.”

“Why, of course they stared at her, but she knew nothing about it; she went all the time with her eyes glued to her guidebook, then gazing up at the pictures.”

The chauffeur’s story seemed to me all the more accurate in that there was indeed a postcard with a picture of the Château, and another of the two Trianons, that Albertine had sent me on the day of her visit. The care with which the obliging chauffeur had followed every step of her course touched

me deeply. How was I to suppose that this rectification—in the form of a generous amplification—of his account given two days earlier was due to the fact that in those two days Albertine, alarmed that the chauffeur should have spoken to me, had surrendered, and made her peace with him? This suspicion never even occurred to me.

It is beyond question that this version of the driver's story, as it rid me of all fear that Albertine might have deceived me, quite naturally cooled me toward my mistress and made me take less interest in the day that she had spent at Versailles. I think, however, that the chauffeur's explanations, which, by absolving Albertine, made me find her even more boring than before, would not perhaps have been sufficient to calm me so quickly. Two little pimples that for a few days my mistress had had on her forehead were perhaps even more effective in modifying the sentiments of my heart. Finally, these were diverted farther still from her (so far that I was conscious of her existence only when I set eyes upon her) by the strange confidence volunteered me by Gilberte's maid, whom I happened to meet. I learned that, when I used to go every day to see Gilberte, she was in love with a young man of whom she saw a great deal more than of me. I had had an inkling of this for a moment at the time, indeed I had questioned this very maid. But, as she knew that I was in love with Gilberte, she had denied, sworn that never had Mlle Swann set eyes on the young man. Now, however, knowing that my love had long since died, that for years past I had left all her letters unanswered—and also perhaps because she was no longer in Gilberte's service—of her own accord she gave me a full account of the amorous episode of which I had known nothing. This seemed to her quite natural. I supposed, remembering her oaths at the time, that she had not been aware of what was going on. Far from it, it was she herself who used to go, at Mme Swann's orders, to inform the young man whenever the one I loved was alone. The one I loved then . . . But I asked myself whether my love of those days was as dead as I thought, for this story pained me. As I do not believe that jealousy can revive a dead love, I supposed that my painful impression was due, in part at least, to the injury to my self-esteem, for a number of people whom I did not like and who at that time and even a little later—their attitude has since altered—affected a contemptuous attitude toward me, knew perfectly well, while I was in love with Gilberte, that I was being duped. And this made me ask myself retrospectively whether in my love for Gilberte there had not been an element of self-love,

since it so pained me now to discover that all the hours of tenderness that had made me so happy, were known by people whom I did not like to be nothing more than a deliberate deception by Gilberte at my expense. In any case, love or self-love, Gilberte was almost dead in me but not entirely, and the result of this distress was to prevent me from worrying myself beyond measure about Albertine, who occupied so small a place in my heart. Nevertheless, to return to her (after so long a parenthesis) and to her excursion to Versailles, the postcards of Versailles (is it possible, then, to have one's heart caught in a noose like this by two simultaneous and interwoven jealousies, each inspired by a different person?) gave me a slightly disagreeable impression whenever, as I tidied my papers, my eye fell upon them. And I thought that if the driver had not been such a worthy fellow, the accordance of his second narrative with Albertine's "cards" would not have amounted to much, for what are the first things that people send you from Versailles but the Château and the Trianons, unless that is to say the postcard has been chosen by some person of refined taste who adores a certain statue, or by some idiot who selects as a "view" of Versailles the station for the horse-drawn carriages or the goods depot.

Even then I am wrong in saying an idiot, such postcards not having always been bought by a person of that sort at random, for their interest as coming from Versailles. For two whole years men of intelligence, artists, used to find Siena,¹⁸⁵ Venice, Granada¹⁸⁶ a "bore," and would say of the humblest omnibus, of every railway carriage: "There you have true beauty." Then this fancy passed like the rest. Indeed, I cannot be certain that people did not revert to the "sacrilege of destroying the noble relics of the past." In any event, a first-class railway carriage ceased to be regarded as *a priori* more beautiful than St. Mark's in Venice.¹⁸⁷ People continued to say: "Here you have real life, the return to the past is artificial," but without drawing any definite conclusion. To make quite certain, without forfeiting any of my confidence in the chauffeur, in order that Albertine might not be able to send him away without his daring to refuse for fear of her taking him for a spy, I never allowed her to go out after this without the reinforcement of Andrée, whereas for some time past I had found the chauffeur sufficient. I had even allowed her then (a thing I would never dare do now) to stay away for three whole days by herself with the chauffeur and to go almost as far as Balbec, so great was her longing to travel at high speed in an open car. Three days during which my mind had been quite at rest, although the rain

of postcards that she had showered upon me did not reach me, owing to the appalling state of the Breton postal system (good in summer, but disorganized, no doubt, in winter), until a week after the return of Albertine and the chauffeur, in such health and vigor that on the very morning of their return they resumed, as though it were nothing, their daily outings. But since the incident at Versailles I had changed. I was delighted that Albertine should be going this afternoon to the Trocadéro, to this “special” matinée, but still more reassured that she would have a companion there in the shape of Andrée.

Dismissing these reflections, now that Albertine had gone out, I went and took my stand for a moment at the window. There was at first a silence, amid which the whistle of the tripe vendor and the horn of the streetcar made the air ring in different octaves, like a blind piano tuner. Then gradually the interwoven motives became distinct, and others were combined with them. There was also a new whistle, the call of a vendor the nature of whose wares I have never discovered, a whistle that was itself exactly like that of the streetcar, and, as it was not carried out of earshot by its own velocity, one thought of a single car, not endowed with motion, or broken down, immobilized, screaming at brief intervals like a dying animal.

And I felt that, should I ever have to leave this aristocratic quarter—unless it were to move to one that was entirely plebeian—the streets and boulevards of central Paris (where the fruit and vegetable stores, fish markets, established in huge food stores, rendered superfluous the cries of the street hawkers, who for that matter would not have been able to make themselves heard) would seem to me very dreary, quite uninhabitable, stripped, drained of all these litanies of small trades and ambulatory victuals, deprived of the orchestra that came every morning to charm me. On the sidewalk a woman with no pretense to fashion (or else obedient to an ugly fashion) came past, too brightly dressed in a sack overcoat of goatskin; but no, it was not a woman, it was a chauffeur who, enveloped in his goatskin, was proceeding on foot to his garage. Winged messengers of variegated hue, escaped from the big hotels, were speeding toward the stations, bent over their handlebars, to meet the arrivals by the morning trains. The throb of a violin was due sometimes to the passing of an automobile, at other times to my not having put enough water in my electric kettle. In the middle of the symphony there rang out an old-fashioned “air”; replacing the bonbon seller, who generally accompanied her song with a

rattle, the toy seller, to whose kazoo was attached a jumping jack that he sent flying in all directions, paraded similar puppets for sale, and without heeding the ritual declamation of Gregory the Great, the reformed declamation of Palestrina,¹⁸⁸ or the lyrical declamation of the modern composers, intoned at the top of his voice, a belated adherent of pure melody:

*Allons les papas, allons les mamans,
Contentez vos petits enfants;
C'est moi qui les fais, c'est moi qui les vends,
Et c'est moi qui boulotte l'argent.
Tra la la la. Tra la la la laire,
Tra la la la la la la.*

*Allons les petits!*¹⁸⁹

Some Italian boys in *bérets* made no attempt to compete with this *aria vivace*, and it was without a word that they offered their little statuettes. Soon, however, a young fifer compelled the toy merchant to move on and to chant more inaudibly, though in brisk time: “*Allons les papas, allons les mamans.*” This young fifer, was he one of the dragoons whom I used to hear in the mornings at Doncières? No, for what followed was: “*Voilà le réparateur de faïence et de porcelaine. Je répare le verre, le marbre, le cristal, l'os, l'ivoire et objets d'antiquité. Voilà le réparateur.*”¹⁹⁰ In a butcher's shop, between an aureole of sunshine on the left and a whole ox suspended from a hook on the right, a butcher boy, very tall and slender, with blond hair and a neck rising above his sky-blue collar, displayed a lightning speed and a religious conscientiousness in putting on one side the most exquisite fillets of beef, on the other the coarsest parts of the rump, placing them upon glittering scales surmounted by a cross, from which hung down beautiful chains, and—albeit he did nothing afterward but arrange in the window a display of kidneys, steaks, ribs—was really far more suggestive of a handsome angel who, on the day of the Last Judgment, will prepare for God, according to their quality, the separation of the good and the wicked and the weighing of souls.¹⁹¹ And once again the thin piercing music of the fife rose in the air, herald no longer of the destruction that Françoise used to dread whenever a regiment of cavalry filed past, but of “repairs” promised by an “antiquary,” simpleton or rogue, who, in either case highly eclectic, instead of specializing, applied his art to the most diverse materials. The young bakers' girls hastened to stuff into

their baskets the long flûtes¹⁹² ordered for some “grand luncheon,” while the milk girls quickly attached the bottles of milk to their yokes. The sense of longing with which my eyes followed these young girls, ought I to consider it quite justified? Would it not have been different if I had been able to detain for a few moments at close quarters one of those whom from the height of my window I saw only inside her shop or in motion?¹⁹³ To estimate the loss that I suffered by my seclusion, that is to say the riches that the day held in store for me, I would have had to intercept in the long unrolling of the animated frieze some girl carrying her linen or her milk, make her pass for a moment, like a silhouette from some mobile stage décor, from the wings to the stage, within the proscenium of my bedroom door, and keep her there before my eyes, not without obtaining some information about her that would enable me to find her again someday, like the inscribed tags that ornithologists or ichthyologists attach, before setting them free, to the legs of the birds or to the fins of the fish whose migrations they want to trace.

And so I asked Françoise, since I had an errand that I wanted done, to be good enough to send up to my room, should any of them call, one or other of those girls who were always coming to take away the dirty linen or bring back the clean, or with bread, or bottles of milk, and whom she herself used often to send on errands. In doing so I was like Elstir, who, obliged to remain closeted in his studio, on certain days in spring when the knowledge that the woods were full of violets gave him a hunger to see some, used to send his concierge’s wife out to buy him a bouquet; then it was not the table upon which he had posed the little floral model, but the whole carpet of the undergrowth where he had seen in other years, in their thousands, the serpentine stems, bowed beneath the weight of their blue beaks, that Elstir would fancy that he had before his eyes, like an imaginary zone defined in his studio by the limpid odor of the evocative flower.

Of a laundry girl, on a Sunday, there was not the slightest prospect. As for the girl who brought the bread, as ill luck would have it, she had rung the bell when Françoise was not around, had left her flûtes in their basket on the landing and had made off. The girl who sold fruit would not call until much later. Once, I had gone to order cheese at the cheese store, and, among the various young assistants, had noticed one girl, extravagantly blonde, tall in stature though still juvenile, who, among the other errand girls, seemed to be daydreaming, in a distinctly haughty attitude. I had seen

her from a distance only, and for so brief an instant that I could not have described her appearance, except to say that she must have grown too fast and that her head supported a mane that gave the impression far less of capillary characteristics than of a sculptor's conventional rendering of the separate meanderings of parallel drifts of snow upon a glacier. This was all that I had been able to make out, apart from a nose sharply outlined (a rare thing in a child) upon a thin face that recalled the beaks of baby vultures. Besides, this clustering of her comrades around about her had not been the only thing that prevented me from seeing her distinctly, there was also my uncertainty whether the sentiments that I might, at first sight and subsequently, inspire in her would be those of injured pride, or of irony, or of a scorn that she would express later on to her friends. These alternative suppositions that I had formed, in an instant, with regard to her, had condensed around about her the troubled atmosphere in which she disappeared, like a goddess in the cloud that is shaken by thunder. For moral uncertainty is a greater obstacle to an exact visual perception than would be any defect of vision. In this too skinny young person, who moreover attracted undue attention, the excess of what another person would perhaps have called her charms was precisely what was calculated to repel me, but had nevertheless had the effect of preventing me from even noticing, let alone remembering anything about the other young dairymaids, whom the hooked nose of this one and her gaze—how unattractive it was!—pensive, personal, with an air of passing judgment, had plunged into perpetual night, as a white streak of lightning darkens the landscape on either side of it. And so, of my call to order a cheese, at the cheese store, I had remembered (if we can say “remember” in speaking of a face so carelessly observed that we adapt to the nullity of the face ten different noses in succession), I had remembered only this girl whom I found unattractive. This is sufficient to engender love. And yet I would have forgotten the extravagantly blonde girl and would never have wished to see her again, had not Françoise told me that, although still quite a gamine, she was brazen and would shortly be leaving her employer, because too coquettish and she owed money to people in the neighborhood. It has been said that beauty is a promise of happiness.¹⁹⁴ Inversely, the possibility of pleasure may be a beginning of beauty.

I began to read Mamma's letter. Beneath her quotations from Madame de Sévigné: “If my thoughts are not entirely black at Combray, they are at least

dark gray, I think of you at every moment; I long for you; your health, your affairs, your absence, what sort of cloud do you suppose they make in my sky?"¹⁹⁵ I felt that my mother was vexed to find Albertine's stay in the house prolonged, and my intention of marriage, although not yet announced to my mistress, confirmed. She did not express her annoyance more directly because she was afraid that I might leave her letters lying about. Even then, veiled as her letters were, she reproached me with not informing her immediately, after each of them, that I had received it: "You remember how Mme de Sévigné said: 'When we are far apart, we no longer laugh at letters that begin with: I have received yours.'"¹⁹⁶ Without referring to what distressed her most, she said that she was annoyed by my lavish expenditure: "Where on earth does all your money go? It is distressing enough that, like Charles de Sévigné, you do not know what you want and are 'two or three people at once,' but do try at least not to be like him in spending money so that I may never have to say of you: 'he has discovered how to spend and have nothing to show, how to lose without gambling and how to pay without clearing himself of debt.'"¹⁹⁷ I had just finished Mamma's letter when Françoise returned to tell me that she had in the house that very same slightly overbold young dairymaid of whom she had spoken to me. "She can quite well take Monsieur's note and do his errands, if it's not too far. Monsieur will see, she's just like a Little Red Ridinghood."¹⁹⁸ Françoise went to fetch the girl, and I could hear her leading the way and saying: "Come along now, you're frightened because there's a corridor, stuff and nonsense, I never thought you would be such a goose. Have I got to lead you by the hand?" And Françoise, like a good and faithful servant who means to see that her master is respected as she respects him herself, had draped herself in the majesty that ennobles the matchmaker in the painting of the old masters where, in comparison with her, the lover and his mistress fade into insignificance.

Elstir, when he gazed at them, had no need to bother about what the violets were doing. The entry of the young dairymaid at once robbed me of my contemplative calm; I could think only of how to give plausibility to the fable of the letter that she was to deliver and I began to write quickly without venturing to cast more than a furtive glance at her, so that I might not seem to have brought her into my room to be scrutinized. She was invested for me with that charm of the unknown not discovered in a pretty

girl found in one of those houses where they wait for you. She was neither naked nor in disguise, but a genuine dairymaid, one of those whom we imagine to be so pretty when we do not have time to approach them; she possessed something of what constitutes the eternal desire, the eternal regret of life, the twofold current of which is at length diverted, directed toward us. Twofold, for if it is a question of the unknown, of a person who must, we guess, be divine, from her stature, her proportions, her indifferent glance, her haughty calm, on the other hand we wish this woman to be thoroughly specialized in her profession, allowing us to escape from ourselves into the world that a particular costume makes us romantically believe different. If for that matter, we seek to comprise in a formula the law of our amorous curiosities, we would have to seek it in the maximum of difference between a woman of whom we have caught sight and one whom we have approached and caressed. If the women of what used at one time to be called “closed houses,” if prostitutes themselves (provided that we know them to be prostitutes) attract us so little, it is not because they are less beautiful than other women, it is because they are ready and waiting; the very object that we are seeking to attain they offer us already; it is because they are not conquests. The difference there is at a minimum. A whore smiles at us already in the street as she will smile when she is in our room. We are sculptors. We are eager to obtain of a woman a statue entirely different from the one that she has presented to us. We have seen a girl strolling, indifferent, insolent, along the seashore, we have seen a shopgirl serious and active, behind her counter, who will answer us curtly, if only so as to escape the teasing of her comrades, a fruit seller who barely answers us at all. And so, we know no rest until we can discover by experiment whether the proud girl on the seashore, the shopgirl on her high horse of “What will people say?,” the preoccupied fruit seller cannot be made, by skillful handling on our part, to relax their rectitudinous attitude, to throw about our neck their fruit-laden arms, to bend toward our lips, with a smile of consent, eyes hitherto cold or absent—oh, the beauty of stern eyes—in working hours when the girl was so afraid of the gossip of her companions, eyes that avoided our obsessive stare and, now that we have seen her alone and face to face, make their pupils yield beneath the sunlit burden of laughter when we speak of making love! Between the shopgirl, the laundress busy with her iron, the fruit seller, the dairymaid on the one hand, and the same girl when she is about to become our mistress, the maximum

difference is attained, stretched indeed to its extreme limits, and varied by those habitual gestures of her profession that make a pair of arms, during the hours of toil, something as different as possible (regarded as an arabesque pattern) from those supple bonds that already every evening are fastened about our neck while the mouth shapes itself for a kiss. And so we spend our whole life in uneasy advances, incessantly renewed, to serious girls whom their calling seems to distance them from us. Once they are in our arms, they are no longer what they were, the distance that we dreamed of crossing has been bridged. But we begin again with other women, we devote to these enterprises all our time, all our money, all our strength, we are enraged by the too cautious driver who is perhaps going to make us miss our first rendezvous, we work ourself into a fever. That first rendezvous, we know all the same that it will mean the vanishing of an illusion. It does not so much matter that the illusion still persists; we wish to see whether we can convert it into reality, and then we think of the laundress whose coldness we remarked. Amorous curiosity is like the one that is aroused in us by the names of places; perpetually disappointed, it revives and remains forever insatiable.

Alas! As soon as she stood before me, the blonde dairymaid with the ribbed tresses, stripped of all that I had imagined and of the desire that had been aroused in me, was reduced to her own self. The quivering cloud of my suppositions no longer enveloped her in a dizzying haze. She acquired an almost sheepish air from having (in place of the ten, the twenty that I recalled in turn without being able to fix any of them in my memory) but a single nose, rounder than I had thought, which made her appear rather stupid and had in any case lost the faculty of multiplying itself. This flyaway caught on the wing, inert, crushed, incapable of adding anything to its own paltry appearance, had no longer my imagination to collaborate with it. Fallen into the inertia of reality, I sought to rebound; her cheeks, which I had not seen in the shop, appeared to me so pretty that I became disconcerted, and, to regain my composure, said to the young dairymaid: "Would you be so kind as to pass me *Le Figaro*, which is lying there, I must make sure of the address to which I am going to send you." Thereupon, as she picked up the newspaper, she disclosed as far as her elbow the red sleeve of her jersey and handed me the conservative sheet with a neat and courteous gesture that pleased me by its intimate rapidity, its soft appearance, and its scarlet hue. While I was opening *Le Figaro*, in order to

say something and without raising my eyes, I asked the girl: "What do you call that red knitted thing you're wearing? It is very becoming." She replied: "It's my golf."¹⁹⁹ For, by a slight downward tendency common to all fashions, the garments and words that, a few years earlier, seemed to belong to the relatively fashionable world of Albertine's friends, were now the currency of working girls. "Are you quite sure it won't be too much trouble," I said, while I pretended to be searching the columns of *Le Figaro*, "if I send you rather a long way?" As soon as I myself appeared to find the service at all arduous that she would be performing by taking a message for me, she began to feel that it would be a bother to her. "The only thing is, I have to be going out presently on my bike. Good heavens, you know, Sunday's the only day we've got." "But won't you catch cold, going bareheaded like that?" "Oh, I won't be bareheaded, I will have my polo,"²⁰⁰ and I could get on without it with all the hair I have." I raised my eyes to the blaze of curling tresses and felt myself caught in their swirl and swept away, with a throbbing heart, amid the lightning and the blasts of a hurricane of beauty. I continued to study the newspaper, but albeit this was only to keep my composure and to gain time, while I merely pretended to read, I took in nevertheless the meaning of the words that were before my eyes, and my attention was caught by the following: "To the program already announced for this afternoon in the great hall of the Trocadéro must be added the name of Mlle Léa who has consented to appear in *Les Fourberies de Nérine*."²⁰¹ She will of course take the part of Nérine, in which she is astounding in her display of verve and bewitching gaiety." It was as though a hand had brutally torn from my heart the bandage beneath which its wound had begun to heal since my return from Balbec. The flood of my anguish escaped in torrents, Léa was the actress friend of the two girls at Balbec whom Albertine, without appearing to see them, had, one afternoon at the casino, watched in the mirror.²⁰² It was true that at Balbec Albertine, at the name of Léa, had adopted a particular tone of compunction in order to say to me, almost shocked that anyone could suspect such a model of virtue: "Oh no, she is not in the least that sort of woman, she is a very respectable person." Unfortunately for me, when Albertine made an affirmation of this sort, it was never anything but the first stage toward other, divergent statements. Shortly after the first, came this second: "I don't know her." In the third phase, after Albertine had spoken to me of

somebody who was “above suspicion” and whom (in the second place) she did not know, she first of all forgot that she had said that she did not know her and then, in a phrase in which she contradicted herself unawares, informed me that she did know her. This first act of oblivion completed, and the new affirmation made, a second act of oblivion began, to wit that the person was above suspicion. “Isn’t So-and-So,” I would ask, “one of those women?” “Why, of course, everybody knows that!” Immediately the note of compunction was sounded afresh to utter a statement that was a vague echo, greatly reduced, of the first statement of all. “I’m bound to say that she has always behaved perfectly properly with me. Of course, she knows that I would send her about her business if she tried it on me. Still, that makes no difference. I am obliged to give her credit for the genuine respect she has always shown for me. It is easy to see she knew the sort of person she had to deal with.” We remember the truth because it has a name, is rooted in the past, but an improvised lie is quickly forgotten. Albertine forgot this latest lie, her fourth, and, one day when she was eager to gain my confidence by confiding in me, went so far as to tell me, with regard to the same person who at the outset had been so respectable and whom she did not know: “She once had a crush on me. She asked me, three or four times, to go home with her and to come upstairs to her room. I saw no harm in going home with her, where everybody could see us, in broad daylight, in the open air. But when we reached her front door I always made some excuse and I never went upstairs.” Shortly after this, Albertine made an allusion to the beautiful things that this lady had in her room. By proceeding from one approximation to another, I would no doubt have arrived at making her tell me the truth that was perhaps less serious than I had been led to believe, for, although perhaps easygoing with women, she preferred a male lover, and now that I was hers she might not have given a thought to Léa. Already, in the case of many women at any rate, it would have been enough for me to collect and present to my mistress, in a synthesis, her contradictory statements, in order to convict her of her misdeeds (misdeeds which, like astronomical laws, it is a great deal easier to deduce by a process of reasoning than to observe, to grasp in reality). But then she would have preferred to say that one of her affirmations had been a lie, the withdrawal of which would thus bring about the collapse of my whole system of evidence, rather than admit that everything she had told me from the start was simply a tissue of mendacious tales. There are similar tales in *The*

Arabian Nights, which we find charming. They pain us, coming from a person whom we love, and thereby enable us to penetrate a little deeper in our knowledge of human nature instead of being content to play upon the surface. Grief penetrates into us and forces us, out of painful curiosity, to penetrate other people.²⁰³ Whence emerge truths that we feel we have no right to keep hidden, so much so that a dying atheist who has discovered them, certain of his own extinction, indifferent to fame, will nevertheless devote his last hours on earth to an attempt to make them known.

Of course, I was still at the first stage of enlightenment with regard to Léa. I was not even aware whether Albertine knew her. No matter, it all came to the same thing. I must at all costs prevent her—at the Trocadéro—from renewing this acquaintance or making the acquaintance of this stranger. I have said that I did not know whether she knew Léa; I ought, however, to have learned it at Balbec, from Albertine herself. For imperfect memory obliterated from my mind as well as from Albertine's a great many of the statements that she had made to me. Memory, instead of being a duplicate always present before our eyes of the various events of our life, is rather a void from which at odd moments a chance resemblance enables us to draw up, restored to life, dead recollections; but even then there are innumerable little details that have not fallen into that potential reservoir of memory, and which will remain forever beyond our control. To anything that we do not know to be related to the real life of the person whom we love we pay no attention, we forget immediately what she has said to us about some incident or people that we do not know, and her expression while she was saying it. And so when, in due course, our jealousy is aroused by these same people, and seeks to make sure that it is not mistaken, that it is they who are responsible for the haste that our mistress shows in leaving the house, her annoyance when we have prevented her from going out by returning earlier than usual, our jealousy ransacking the past in search of a clue can find nothing; always retrospective, it is like a historian who has to write the history of a period for which he has no documents; always belated, it dashes like a mad bull to the spot where it will not find the proud and brilliant creature who is infuriating it with his darts and whom the crowd admires for his splendor and his cunning. Jealousy fights the empty air, uncertain as we are in those dreams in which we are distressed because we cannot find in his empty house a person whom we have known well in life, but who here perhaps is really another

person and has merely borrowed the features of our friend, uncertain as we are even more after we awake when we seek to identify this or that detail of our dream. What was our mistress's expression when she told us this; did she not look happy, was she not actually whistling, a thing that she never does unless there is some amorous thought in her mind and our presence importunes and irritates her? Hasn't she told us something that is contradicted by what she now affirms, that she knows or does not know such and such a person? We do not know, we will never find out; we strain after the unsubstantial fragments of a dream, and all the time our life with our mistress continues, our life indifferent to what we do not know to be important to us, attentive to what is perhaps of no importance, a nightmare inhabited by people who have no real connection to us, full of lapses of memory, gaps, vain anxieties, our life as fantastic as a dream.

I realized that the young dairymaid was still in the room. I told her that the place was certainly a long way off, that I did not need her. Whereupon she also decided that it would be too much trouble: "There's a fine match coming up, I don't want to miss it." I felt that she must already be devoted to sport and that in a few years' time she would be talking about "living her own life." I told her that I certainly did not need her any longer and gave her five francs. Immediately, having little expected this largesse, and telling herself that if she earned five francs for doing nothing she would have a great deal more for doing my errand, she began to find that her match was of no importance. "I could easily have taken your message. I can always find time." But I pushed her toward the door, I needed to be alone, I must at all costs prevent Albertine from meeting Léa's girlfriends at the Trocadéro. I must try, and I must succeed; to tell the truth, I did not yet see how, and during these first moments I opened my hands, gazed at them, cracked my knuckles, whether because the mind that cannot find what it is seeking, in a fit of laziness allows itself to halt for an instant at a spot where the most unimportant things are distinctly visible to it, like the blades of grass on the embankment that we see from the carriage window trembling in the wind, when the train halts in the open country—an immobility that is not always more fertile than that of the captured animal, which, paralyzed by fear or fascinated, gazes without moving a muscle—or because I was holding my body in readiness—with my mind at work inside it and, in my mind, the means of action against this or that person—as though it were no more than a weapon from which would be fired the shot that would separate Albertine

from Léa and her two friends. It is true that earlier in the morning, when Françoise had come in to tell me that Albertine was going to the Trocadéro, I had said to myself: "Albertine is at liberty to do as she pleases" and had supposed that until evening came, in this radiant weather, her actions would remain without any perceptible importance to me; but it was not only the morning sun, as I had thought, that had made me so careless; it was because, having obliged Albertine to abandon the plans that she might perhaps have initiated or even completed at the Verdurins', and having restricted her to attending a matinée that I myself had chosen, so that she could not have made any preparations, I knew that whatever she did would of necessity be innocent. Just as, if Albertine had said a few moments later: "If I kill myself, it's all the same to me," it would have been because she was certain that she would not kill herself. Surrounding myself and Albertine there had been this morning (far more than the sunlight in the air) the atmosphere that we do not see, but by the translucent and changing medium of which we do see, I her actions, she the importance of her own life, that is to say those beliefs that we do not perceive but that are no more assimilable to a pure vacuum than is the air that surrounds us; composing around about us a variable atmosphere, sometimes excellent, often unbreathable, they deserve to be studied and recorded as carefully as the temperature, the barometric pressure, the weather, for our days have their own singularity, physical and moral. My belief, which I had failed to notice this morning, and yet in which I had been joyously enveloped until the moment when I had looked a second time at *Le Figaro*, that Albertine would not do any harm, this belief had vanished. I was living no longer in the fine sunny day, but in a day carved out of the other by my anxiety that Albertine might renew her acquaintance with Léa and more easily still with the two girls, should they go, as seemed to me probable, to applaud the actress at the Trocadéro, where it would not be difficult for them, in one of the intermissions, to find Albertine. I no longer thought of Mlle Vinteuil, the name of Léa had brought back to my mind, to make me jealous, the image of Albertine in the casino watching the two girls. For I possessed in my memory only series of Albertines, separate from one another, incomplete, profiles, snapshots; and so my jealousy was restricted to an intermittent expression, at once fugitive and fixed, and to the people who had caused that expression to appear on Albertine's face. I remembered her when, at Balbec, she received undue gazes from the two girls or from

women of that sort; I remembered the distress that I felt when I saw her face subjected to an active scrutiny, like that of a painter preparing to make a sketch, entirely absorbed by them, and, doubtless on account of my presence, submitting to this contact without appearing to notice it, with a passivity that was perhaps clandestinely voluptuous. And before she recovered herself and spoke to me there was an instant during which Albertine did not move, smiled into the empty air, with the same air of feigned spontaneity and concealed pleasure as if she were posing for somebody to take her photograph; or even seeking to assume before the camera a more dashing pose—the one that she had adopted at Doncières when we were walking with Saint-Loup, and, laughing and passing her tongue over her lips, she pretended to be teasing a dog. Certainly, at such moments she was not at all the same as when it was she who was interested in little girls who passed by. Then, on the contrary, her narrow velvety gaze fastened itself upon, glued itself to the passerby, so adherent, so corrosive, that you felt that on removing her gaze, it must tear away the skin. But at that moment this other expression, which did at least give her a serious air, almost as though she were in pain, had seemed to me a pleasant relief after the blank, blissful expression she had worn in the presence of the two girls, and I would have preferred the somber expression of the desire that she did perhaps feel at times to the laughing expression caused by the desire that she aroused. However she might attempt to conceal her awareness of it, it bathed her, enveloped her, vaporous, voluptuous, made her whole face appear rosy. But everything that Albertine held at such moments suspended in herself, that radiated around her and hurt me so acutely, how could I tell whether, once my back was turned, she would continue to keep it to herself, whether to the advances of the two girls, now that I was no longer with her, she would not make some audacious response? Certainly these memories caused me intense suffering, they were like a complete admission of Albertine's taste, a general confession of her infidelity against which were powerless the various oaths that she swore to me and I wished to believe, the negative results of my incomplete inquiries, the assurances, made perhaps in connivance with her, of Andrée. Albertine might deny specific betrayals; by words that she let fall, more forceful than her declarations to the contrary, by those searching gazes alone, she had confessed to what she would have wanted to hide far more than any specific incident, what she would have let herself be killed sooner than admit: her natural penchant.

For there is no one who will willingly deliver up his soul. Notwithstanding the pain that these memories were causing me, could I have denied that it was the program of the matinée at the Trocadéro that had revived my need of Albertine? She was one of those women in whom their misdeeds may at a pinch take the place of absent charms, and no less than their misdeeds the kindness that follows them and restores to us that sense of comfort that in their company, like an invalid who is never well for two days in succession, we are incessantly obliged to recapture. And then, even more than their misdeeds while we are in love with them, there are their misdeeds before we made their acquaintance, and first and foremost: their nature. What makes this sort of love painful is, in fact, that there preexists a sort of original sin of Woman, a sin that makes us love them, so that, when we forget it, we feel less need of them, and to begin to love again we must begin to suffer again. At this moment, the thought that she must not meet the two girls again and the question of whether or not she knew Léa were what was preoccupying me most, in spite of the rule that we ought not to take an interest in particular facts except in relation to their general significance, and notwithstanding the childishness, as great as that of longing to travel or to make friends with women, of shattering our curiosity against such elements of the invisible torrent of painful realities, that will always remain unknown to us as have fortuitously crystallized in our mind. But, even if we should succeed in destroying that crystallization, it would at once be replaced by another. Yesterday I was afraid that Albertine might go to see Mme Verdurin. Now my only thought was of Léa. Jealousy, which wears a blindfold over its eyes, is not merely powerless to discover anything in the darkness that enshrouds it, it is also one of those tortures where the task must be incessantly repeated, like that of the Danaïds, or of Ixion.²⁰⁴ Even if the two girls were not there, what impression might she not form of Léa, beautified by her stage attire, glorified by success, what thoughts would she leave in Albertine's mind, what desires that, even if she repressed them, would in my house disgust her with a life in which she was unable to gratify them? Besides, how could I tell that she did not know Léa, and would not pay her a visit in her dressing room; and, even if Léa did not know her, who could assure me that, having certainly seen her at Balbec, she would not recognize her and make a signal to her from the stage which would entitle Albertine to seek admission backstage? A danger seems easy to avoid after it has been averted. This one was not yet averted, I was afraid

that it might not be, and it seemed to me all the more terrible. And yet this love for Albertine that I felt almost vanish when I attempted to realize it, seemed in a measure to acquire a proof of its existence from the intensity of my suffering at this moment. I no longer cared about anything else, I thought only of how I was to prevent her from remaining at the Trocadéro, I would have offered any sum in the world to Léa to persuade her not to go there. If then we prove our preference by the action that we perform rather than by the idea that we form, I must have been in love with Albertine. But this renewal of my suffering gave no further consistency to the image that I beheld of Albertine. She caused my calamities like a deity who remains invisible. Making endless conjectures, I sought to shield myself from suffering without thereby realizing my love.

First of all, I had to make certain that Léa was really going to perform at the Trocadéro. After dismissing the dairymaid, giving her two francs,²⁰⁵ I telephoned Bloch, whom I knew to be on friendly terms with Léa, in order to ask him. He knew nothing about it and seemed surprised that it could be of any interest to me. I decided that I had to act quickly, remembered that Françoise was ready to go out and that I was not, and as I rose and dressed made Françoise take an automobile; she was to go to the Trocadéro, buy a ticket, look everywhere for Albertine, and give her a note from me. In this note I told her that I was greatly upset by a letter that I had just received from that same lady on whose account she would remember that I had been so wretched one night at Balbec.²⁰⁶ I reminded her that, on the following day, she had reproached me for not having sent for her. And so I was taking the liberty, I informed her, of asking her to sacrifice her matinée and to join me at home so that we might take a little fresh air together, which might help me to recover from the shock. But since it would be a while before I was dressed and ready, she would oblige me, seeing that she had Françoise as an escort, by going to the Trois Quartiers (this store, being smaller, seemed to me less dangerous than the Bon Marché) to buy the guimpe of white tulle that she required.

My note was probably not superfluous. To tell the truth, I knew nothing that Albertine had done since I had come to know her, or even before. But in her conversation (she might, had I mentioned it to her, have replied that I had misunderstood her) there were certain contradictions, certain embellishments that seemed to me as decisive as catching her in flagrante delicto, but less usable against Albertine, who, often caught out in

wrongdoing like a child, had invariably, by dint of sudden, strategic changes of front, stultified my cruel attacks and reestablished her own position. Cruel, most of all, to myself. She employed, not from any refinement of style, but in order to correct her imprudences, abrupt breaches of syntax not unlike that figure that the grammarians call *anacoluthon* or some such name. Having allowed herself, while discussing women, to say: “I remember, the other day, I . . . ,” she would suddenly, after a “quarter-note rest,” change the “I” to “she”: it was something that she had witnessed as an innocent spectator, not a thing that she herself had done. It was not she who was the subject of the action. I would have liked to recall how, exactly, the sentence had begun, so as to conclude for myself, since she had broken off in the middle, how it would have ended. But since I had been waiting for the end, I found it hard to remember the beginning, from which perhaps my air of interest had made her deviate and was left still anxious to know what she was really thinking, what she really remembered. Unfortunately, the beginnings of a lie on the part of our mistress are like the beginnings of our own love, or of a vocation. They take shape, accumulate, pass, without our paying them any attention. When we want to remember in what manner we began to love a woman, we are already in love with her; daydreaming about her before, we did not say to ourselves: This is the prelude to love, be careful!—and our daydreams crept up on us, barely noticed by us. So also, except in cases that are comparatively rare, it is only for the convenience of my narrative that I have frequently in these pages confronted one of Albertine’s lies with her previous assertion upon the same subject. This previous assertion, as often as not, since I could not read the future and did not at the time guess what contradictory affirmation was to form a pendant to it, had slipped past unperceived, heard it is true by my ears, but without my isolating it from the continuous flow of Albertine’s speech. Later on, faced with the self-evident lie, or seized by an anxious doubt, I would try to recall it; but in vain; my memory had not been warned in time, and had thought it unnecessary to keep a copy.

I told Françoise, when she had gotten Albertine out of the theater, to let me know by telephone, and to bring her home, whether she was willing or not.

“That would be the last straw, that she wouldn’t be willing to come and see Monsieur,” replied Françoise.

“But I don’t know that she’s as fond as all that of seeing me.”

“Then she must be an ungrateful wretch,” went on Françoise, in whom Albertine was renewing after all these years the same torment of envy that Eulalie used at one time to cause her in my aunt’s sickroom.²⁰⁷ Unaware that Albertine’s position in my household was not of her own seeking but had been chosen by me (a fact that, from motives of self-esteem and to make Françoise angry, I preferred to hide from her), she admired and execrated the girl’s cunning, called her when she spoke of her to the other servants an “actress,” a cajoler who could twist me around her little finger. She dared not yet declare open war against her, showed her a smiling face and sought to acquire merit in my sight by the services that she performed for me in her relations with me, deciding that it was useless to say anything to me and that she would gain nothing by doing so; but if the opportunity ever arose, if ever she discovered a crack in Albertine’s armor, she was fully determined to enlarge it, and to part us once and for all.

“Ungrateful? No, Françoise, I think I’m the one who is ungrateful, you don’t know how good she is to me.” (It was so soothing to give the impression that I was loved.) “Be as quick as you can.”

“All right, I’ll get a move on.”

Her daughter’s influence was beginning to contaminate Françoise’s vocabulary. So it is that all languages lose their purity by the admission of new words. For this decadence of Françoise’s speech, which I had known in its golden period, I was myself indirectly responsible. Françoise’s daughter would not have made her mother’s classic language degenerate into the vilest slang, had she been content to converse with her in dialect. She had never given up the use of it, and when they were both near me, if they had anything private to say, instead of shutting themselves up in the kitchen, they armed themselves, right in the middle of my room, with a screen more impenetrable than the most carefully shut door, by conversing in dialect. I supposed merely that the mother and daughter were not always on the best of terms, if I was to judge by the frequency with which they employed the only word that I could make out: *m’exasperate* (unless the object of their exasperation was myself). Unfortunately, the most unfamiliar tongue becomes intelligible in time when we are always hearing it spoken. I was sorry that this should be dialect, for I succeeded in picking it up, and would have been no less successful had Françoise been in the habit of expressing herself in Persian. In vain might Françoise, when she became aware of my progress, accelerate the speed of her delivery, and her daughter likewise: it

did no good. The mother was greatly put out that I understood their dialect, then delighted to hear me speak it. I am bound to admit that her delight was a mocking delight, for although I came in time to pronounce the words more or less as she herself did, she found between our two ways of pronunciation an abyss of difference that gave her infinite joy, and she began to regret that she no longer saw people to whom she had not given a thought for years but who, it appeared, would have rocked with a laughter that it would have done her good to hear, if they could have heard me speaking their dialect so badly. In any case, no joy came to mitigate her sorrow that, however badly I might pronounce it, I understood her completely. Keys become useless when the person whom we seek to prevent from entering can avail himself of a skeleton key or a crowbar. Dialect having become useless as a means of defense, she took to conversing with her daughter in a French that rapidly became that of the most debased epochs.

I was now ready, but Françoise had not yet telephoned; I should perhaps have gone out without waiting for a message. But how could I tell that she would find Albertine, that the latter would not have gone backstage, that even if Françoise did find her, she would allow herself to be brought back? Half an hour later the telephone bell began to tinkle, and my heart throbbed tumultuously with hope and fear. There came, at the bidding of an operator, a flying squadron of sounds that with an instantaneous speed brought me the words of the telephone operator, not those of Françoise whom an inherited timidity and melancholy, when she was brought face to face with any object unknown to her fathers, prevented from approaching a telephone receiver, although she would readily visit a person suffering from a contagious disease. She had found Albertine in the lobby by herself, and Albertine had simply gone to tell Andrée that she was not staying any longer and then had hurried back to Françoise.

“She wasn’t angry? Oh, I beg your pardon! Please ask the lady whether the demoiselle was angry?”

“The lady asks me to say that she wasn’t at all angry,²⁰⁸ quite the contrary, in fact; anyhow, if she wasn’t pleased, she didn’t show it. They are going now to the Trois Quartiers and will be home by two o’clock.”

I gathered that two o’clock meant three, for it was past two o’clock already. But Françoise suffered from one of those peculiar, permanent, incurable defects, which we call pathological; she was never able either to

read or to give the time correctly. I have never been able to understand what went on in her head. When Françoise, after consulting her watch, if it was two o'clock, said: "It is one" or "it is three o'clock," I have never been able to understand whether the phenomenon that occurred was situated in her vision or in her thought or in her speech; the one thing certain is that the phenomenon never failed to occur. Humanity is very old. Heredity, crossbreeding have given an insurmountable strength to bad habits, to faulty reflexes. One person sneezes and gasps because he is passing by a rosebush, another breaks out in a rash at the smell of wet paint, has frequent attacks of colic if he has to start on a journey, and grandchildren of thieves who are themselves millionaires and generous cannot resist the temptation to rob you of fifty francs. As for understanding Françoise's incapacity to tell the time correctly, she herself never threw any light upon the problem. For, notwithstanding the anger that I generally displayed at her inaccurate replies, Françoise never attempted either to apologize for her mistake or to explain it. She remained silent, pretending not to hear me, and thereby making me lose my temper altogether. I would have liked to hear a few words of justification, were it only to demolish them; but not a word, an indifferent silence. In any case, about the timetable for today there could be no doubt; Albertine was coming home with Françoise at three o'clock, Albertine would not be meeting Léa or her friends. Whereupon the danger of her renewing relations with them, having been averted, it at once began to lose its importance in my eyes and I was amazed, seeing with what ease it had been averted, that I should have supposed that I would not succeed in averting it. I felt a keen impulse of gratitude to Albertine, who, I could see, had not gone to the Trocadéro to meet Léa's friends, and showed me, by leaving the matinée and coming home at a word from me, that she belonged to me for the future even more than I had imagined. My gratitude was even greater when a cyclist brought me a note from her bidding me be patient, and full of the charming expressions that she was in the habit of using. "My darling, dear Marcel, I return less quickly than this cyclist, whose bike I would like to borrow in order to be with you sooner. How could you imagine that I might be angry or that I could enjoy anything better than to be with you? It will be nice to go out, just the two of us together; it would be nicer still if we never went out except together. The ideas you get into your head! What a Marcel! What a Marcel! Always and ever your Albertine."

The dresses that I bought for her, the yacht of which I had spoken to her, the Fortuny dressing gowns, all these things having in this obedience on Albertine's part not their recompense but their complement, appeared to me now as so many privileges that I was enjoying; for the duties and expenditures of a master are part of his dominion, and define it, prove it, fully as much as his rights. And these rights that she recognized in me were precisely what gave my expenditures their true character: I had a woman of my own, who, at the first word that I sent to her unexpectedly, had my messenger telephone humbly that she was coming, that she was allowing herself to be brought home immediately. I was more of a master than I had supposed. More of a master, in other words more of a slave. I no longer felt the slightest impatience to see Albertine. The certainty that she was at this moment engaged in shopping with Françoise, or that she would return with her at an approaching moment that I would willingly have postponed, illuminated like a calm and radiant star a period of time that I would now have been far better pleased to spend alone. My love for Albertine had made me rise and get ready to go out, but it would prevent me from enjoying my outing. I reflected that, on a Sunday afternoon like this, little shopgirls, *midinettes*,²⁰⁹ prostitutes must be strolling in the Bois. And with the words *midinettes*, *little shopgirls* (as had often happened to me with a proper name, the name of a girl read in the account of a ball), with the image of a white bodice, a short skirt, since beneath them I placed an unknown girl who might perhaps come to love me, I created out of nothing desirable women, and said to myself: "How charming they must be!" But of what use would it be to me that they were charming, seeing that I was not going out alone?

Taking advantage of the fact that I still was alone, and drawing the curtains together so that the sun would not prevent me from reading the notes, I sat down at the piano, turned over the pages of Vinteuil's Sonata, which happened to be lying there, and began to play; seeing that Albertine's arrival was still a matter of some time but was on the other hand certain, I had at once time to spare and peace of mind. Basking in the expectation, fully confirmed, of her return escorted by Françoise and in my confidence in her docility as in the blessedness of an inner light as warming as the light of the sun, I might dispose of my thoughts, detach them for a moment from Albertine, apply them to the Sonata. And in the latter, I did not even take pains to notice how the combinations of the voluptuous and anxious motifs

corresponded even more closely now to my love for Albertine, from which jealousy had been absent for so long that I had been able to confess to Swann my ignorance of that sentiment.²¹⁰ No, taking the Sonata from another point of view, regarding it in itself as the work of a great artist, I was carried back upon the tide of sound to the days at Combray—I do not mean at Montjouvain and along the Méséglise way, but to walks along the Guermantes way—when I had myself longed to become an artist.²¹¹ In definitely abandoning that ambition, had I forfeited something real? Could life console me for the loss of art? Was there in art a more profound reality, in which our true personality finds an expression that is not afforded it by the activities of life? Every great artist seems indeed so different from all the rest and gives us so strongly that sensation of individuality for which we seek in vain in our everyday existence! Just as I was thinking thus, I was struck by a passage in the Sonata, a passage with which I was quite familiar, but sometimes our attention throws a different light upon things that we have long known, and we notice in them what we have never seen before. As I played the passage, and although Vinteuil had been trying to express in it a vision that would have been wholly foreign to Wagner, I could not help murmuring “*Tristan!*” with the smile of an old friend of the family discovering a trace of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who never set eyes on him. And as the friend then examines a photograph that enables him to specify the likeness, so, in front of Vinteuil’s Sonata, I set up on the music rest the score of *Tristan*, a selection from which was being given that afternoon, as it happened, at the Lamoureux concert.²¹² In admiring the Bayreuth²¹³ master, I did not have any of the scruples of those people like Nietzsche,²¹⁴ whose sense of duty bids them to shun, in art as in life, the beauty that tempts them, and who, tearing themselves from *Tristan* as they renounce *Parsifal*,²¹⁵ and, in their spiritual asceticism, progressing from one mortification to another, succeed, by following the most bloody of the stations of the cross, in exalting themselves to the pure cognition and perfect adoration of *Le Postillon de Longjumeau*.²¹⁶ I realized how much reality there is in the work of Wagner, when I saw in my mind’s eye those insistent, fleeting themes that visit an act, withdraw only to return, and, sometimes distant, somnolent, almost detached, are at other moments, while remaining vague, so pressing and so

near, so internal, so organic, so visceral, that they seem like the reprise not so much of a musical motif as of an attack of neuralgia.

Music, very different in this respect from Albertine's company, helped me to descend into myself, to make there a new discovery: the variety that I had sought in vain in life, in travel, but a longing for which was nonetheless given me by this sonorous tide that sent its sunlit waves to expire at my feet. A twofold diversity. As the spectrum makes visible to us the composition of light, so the harmony of a Wagner, the color of an Elstir enable us to know that essential quality of another person's sensations into which love for another person does not allow us to penetrate. Then there is diversity inside the work itself, by the sole means that it has of being effectively diverse, to wit combining diverse individualities. Where a minor composer would pretend that he was portraying a squire, or a knight, whereas he would make them both sing the same music, Wagner on the contrary allots to each denomination a different reality, and whenever a squire appears, it is an individual figure, at once complicated and simplified, that, with a joyous, feudal clash of warring sounds, inscribes itself in the vast, sonorous mass.²¹⁷ Whence the plenitude of a music that is indeed filled with so many different musics, each of which is a person. A person or the impression that is given us by a momentary aspect of nature. Even what is most independent of the sentiment that it makes us feel preserves its outward and entirely definite reality; the song of a bird, the ring of a hunter's horn, the air that a shepherd plays upon his pipe, cut out against the horizon their silhouette of sound.²¹⁸ It is true that Wagner had still to bring these together, to embrace them, to introduce them into an orchestral whole, to make them subservient to the highest musical ideals, but always respecting their original nature, as a cabinetmaker respects the grain, the peculiar essence of the wood that he is carving.

But notwithstanding the richness of these works in which the contemplation of nature has its place alongside the action, alongside individuals who are something more than the names of characters, I thought how markedly, all the same, these works partake of that quality of being—albeit marvelously—always incomplete, that is the characteristic of all the great works of the nineteenth century, whose greatest writers bungled their books, but, watching themselves work as though they were at once worker and critic, have derived from this self-contemplation a new form of beauty, exterior and superior to the work itself, imposing upon it retrospectively a

unity, a greatness that it does not possess. Without pausing to consider the one who saw in his novels, after they had appeared, a *Comédie humaine*,²¹⁹ nor those who entitled heterogeneous poems or essays *La Légende des siècles*²²⁰ or *La Bible de l'humanité*,²²¹ can we not say all the same of the last of these that he is so perfect an incarnation of the nineteenth century that the greatest beauties in Michelet are to be sought not so much in his work itself as in the attitudes that he adopts when he is considering his work, not in his *Histoire de France*²²² nor in his *Histoire de la Révolution*,²²³ but in his prefaces to these books? Prefaces, that is to say pages written after the books themselves, in which he considers the books, and with which we must include here and there certain sentences beginning as a rule with a: "Shall I say?"²²⁴ which is not a scholar's precaution but a musician's cadence. The other musician, the one who was delighting me at this moment, Wagner, retrieving some exquisite scrap from a drawer of his writing table to make it appear as a theme, retrospectively necessary, in a work of which he had not been thinking at the moment when he composed it, then having composed a first mythological opera, and a second, and afterward others still, and perceiving all of a sudden that he had written a Tetralogy,²²⁵ must have felt something of the same exhilaration as Balzac, when, casting over his works the eye at once of a stranger and of a father, finding in one the purity of Raphael,²²⁶ in another the simplicity of the Gospel, he suddenly decided, as he projected a retrospective illumination upon them, that they would be better brought together in a cycle in which the same characters would reappear, and added to his work, in this act of joining it together, a stroke of the brush, the last and the most sublime. A unity that was ulterior, not factitious, otherwise it would have crumbled into dust like so many of the other systematizations of mediocre writers who with the elaborate assistance of titles and subtitles give themselves the appearance of having pursued a single and transcendent design. Not factitious, perhaps indeed all the more real for being ulterior, for being born of a moment of enthusiasm when it is discovered to exist among fragments that need only to be joined together, a unity that has been unaware of itself, therefore vital and not logical, that has not prohibited variety, chilled execution. It emerges (only applying itself this time to the work as a whole) like a fragment composed separately, born of an inspiration, not required by the artificial development of a theme, which comes in to form an integral

part of the rest. Before the great orchestral movement that precedes the return of Yseult,²²⁷ it is the work itself that has attracted to it the half-forgotten air of a shepherd's pipe.²²⁸ And, no doubt, just as the swelling of the orchestra at the approach of the ship, when it takes hold of these notes on the pipe, transforms them, infects them with its own intoxication, breaks their rhythm, clarifies their tone, accelerates their movement, multiplies their instrumentation, so no doubt Wagner himself was filled with joy when he discovered in his memory a shepherd's air, incorporated it in his work, gave it its full wealth of meaning.²²⁹ This joy moreover never forsakes him. In him, however great the melancholy of the poet, it is consoled, surpassed—that is to say destroyed, alas, too soon—by the exultation of the craftsman. But then, no less than by the similarity I had remarked just now between Vinteuil's phrase and Wagner's, I was troubled by the thought of this Vulcan-like craftsmanship. Could it be this that gave to great artists the illusory appearance of a fundamental originality, incommensurable with any other, the reflection of a more than human reality, actually the result of industrious toil? If art is nothing more than that, it is not more real than life and I had less cause for regret.²³⁰ I went on playing *Tristan*. Separated from Wagner by the wall of sound, I could hear him exult, invite me to share his joy, I could hear ring out all the louder the immortally youthful laughter and the hammer-blows of Siegfried,²³¹ in which, moreover, more marvelously struck were those phrases, the technical skill of the craftsman serving merely to make it easier for them to leave the earth, birds akin not to Lohengrin's swan²³² but to that airplane that I had seen at Balbec convert its energy into vertical motion, glide over the sea and lose itself in the sky.²³³ Perhaps, as the birds that soar highest and fly most swiftly have stronger wings, one required one of these frankly material vehicles to explore the infinite, one of these 120 horsepower machines, named Mystery, in which nevertheless, however high one flies, one is prevented to some extent from enjoying the silence of space by the overpowering roar of the engine!

For some reason or other the course of my reveries, which hitherto had wandered among musical memories, turned now to those men who have been the best performers of music in our day, among whom, slightly exaggerating his merit, I included Morel. At once my thoughts took a sharp turn, and it was Morel's character, certain eccentricities of his nature that I began to consider. As it happened—and this might be connected though it

should not be confused with the neurasthenia to which he was prey—Morel was in the habit of talking about his life, but always presented so shadowy a picture of it that it was difficult to make anything out. For example, he placed himself entirely at M. de Charlus's disposal on the understanding that he must keep his evenings free, as he wished to be able after dinner to take an algebra course. M. de Charlus conceded this, but insisted upon seeing him after the classes.

"Impossible, it's an old Italian painting" (this witticism means nothing when written down like this; but M. de Charlus having made Morel read *L'Éducation sentimentale*,²³⁴ in the penultimate chapter of which Frédéric Moreau uses this expression, it was Morel's idea of a joke never to say the word "impossible" without following it up with "it's an old Italian painting"), "the classes go on very late and it's already a great inconvenience to the professor, who naturally would be annoyed if I left in the middle."

"But there's no need to take a course, algebra is not a thing like swimming, or even English, you can learn it equally well from a book," replied M. de Charlus, who had guessed from the first that these algebra lessons were one of those images of which it was impossible to make out anything at all. It was perhaps some affair with a woman, or, if Morel was seeking to earn money in shady ways and had attached himself to the secret police, a nocturnal expedition with detectives, or possibly, what was even worse, an engagement as a gigolo whose services may be required in a brothel.

"A great deal easier from a book," Morel assured M. de Charlus, "for it's impossible to make head or tail of the lessons."

"Then why don't you study it in my house, where you would be far more comfortable?" M. de Charlus might have replied, but took care not to do so, knowing that at once, preserving only the same essential element that the evening hours must be set apart, the imaginary algebra course would change to a compulsory lesson in dancing or in drawing. In which M. de Charlus might have seen that he was mistaken, partially at least, for Morel did often spend his time at the baron's in solving equations. M. de Charlus did raise the objection that algebra could be of little use to a violinist. Morel replied that it was a distraction that helped him to pass the time and to conquer his neurasthenia. No doubt M. de Charlus might have made inquiries, have tried to find out what actually were these mysterious and

ineluctable algebra lessons that were given only at night. But M. de Charlus was not qualified to unravel the tangled skein of Morel's occupations, being himself too much caught in the toils of social life. The visits he received or paid, the time he spent at his club, dinner parties, evenings at the theater prevented him from thinking about the problem, or for that matter about the viciousness, both violent and vindictive that Morel had (it was reported) indulged and at the same time sought to conceal in the successive circles, the different towns through which he had passed, and where people still spoke of him with a shudder, with bated breath, never daring to say anything about him. It was unfortunately one of the outbursts of this neurotic viciousness that I was privileged to hear that day when, rising from the piano, I went down to the courtyard to meet Albertine, who still had not arrived. As I passed by Jupien's shop, in which Morel and the girl who, I supposed, was shortly to become his wife were by themselves, Morel was screaming at the top of his voice, thereby revealing an accent that I had never heard in his speech, a rustic tone, suppressed as a rule, and very strange indeed. His words were no less strange, faulty from the point of view of the French language, but his knowledge of everything was imperfect. "Will you get out of here, *grand pied-de-grue*, *grand pied-de-grue*, *grand pied-de-grue*,"²³⁵ he repeated to the poor girl who at first had certainly not understood what he meant, and now, trembling and indignant, stood motionless before him. "Didn't I tell you to get out of here, *grand pied-de-grue*, *grand pied-de grue*; go and fetch your uncle till I tell him what you are, you whore."²³⁶ Just at that moment the voice of Jupien, who was coming home talking to one of his friends, was heard in the courtyard, and as I knew that Morel was an utter coward, I decided that it was unnecessary to join my forces with those of Jupien and his friend, who in another moment would have entered the shop, and I retired upstairs again to avoid Morel, who, for all his having pretended to be so eager that Jupien should be fetched (probably in order to frighten and subjugate the girl, an act of blackmail that rested probably upon no foundation), made haste to depart as soon as he heard him in the courtyard. The words I have set down here are nothing, they would not explain why my heart throbbed so as I went upstairs. These scenes that we witness in our lives find an incalculable element of strength in what soldiers call, in speaking of a military offensive, the advantage of surprise, and however agreeably I might be soothed by the knowledge that Albertine, instead of remaining at the Trocadéro, was

coming home to me, I still heard ringing in my ears the accent of those words ten times repeated: “*Grand pied-de-grue, grand pied-de-grue,*” which had so upset me.

Gradually my agitation subsided. Albertine was on her way home. I would hear her ring the bell in a moment. I felt that my life was no longer even what it could have been, and that to have a woman in the house like this with whom quite naturally, when she returned home, I would have to go out, to the adornment of whose person the strength and activity of my being were to be ever more and more diverted, made me as it were a bough that has blossomed, but is weighed down by the abundant fruit into which all its reserves of strength have passed. In contrast to the anxiety that I had been feeling only an hour earlier, the calm that I now felt at the prospect of Albertine’s return was more ample than the one I had felt in the morning before she had left the house. Anticipating the future, of which my mistress’s docility made me practically master, more resistant, as though it were filled and stabilized by the imminent, importunate, inevitable, gentle presence, it was the calm (dispensing us from the obligation to seek our happiness in ourselves) that is born of family feeling and domestic bliss. Family and domestic: such was again, no less than the sentiment that had brought me such great peace while I was waiting for Albertine, that which I felt later on when I drove out with her. She took off her glove for a moment, whether to touch my hand, or to dazzle me by letting me see on her little finger, next to the ring that Mme Bontemps had given her, another ring upon which was displayed the large and liquid surface of a clear sheet of ruby.

“What! Another ring, Albertine. Your aunt is generous!”

“No, I didn’t get this from my aunt,” she said with a laugh. “I bought it myself, now that, thanks to you, I can save up so much money. I don’t even know whose it was before. A traveler who was short of money left it with the landlord of a hotel where I stayed at Le Mans.^{[237](#)} He didn’t know what to do with it and would have let it go for much less than it was worth. But it was still far too expensive for me. Now that, thanks to you, I’m becoming a chic lady, I wrote to ask him if he still had it. And here it is.”

“That makes a great many rings, Albertine. Where will you put the one that I am going to give you? Anyhow, this one is very pretty. I can’t quite make out what that is carved around the ruby, it looks like the head of a man grinning. But my eyes aren’t strong enough.”

“They might be as strong as you like, you would be none the wiser. I can’t make it out either.”

In the past it had often happened, as I read somebody’s memoirs, or a novel, in which a man always goes out driving with a woman, takes tea with her, that I longed to be able to do likewise. I had thought sometimes that I had succeeded in doing so, as for example when I took Saint-Loup’s mistress out with me or went to dinner with her. But in vain might I summon to my assistance the idea that I was at that moment actually impersonating the character that I had envied in the novel, that idea assured me that I ought to find pleasure in Rachel’s society, and afforded me none. For, whenever we attempt to imitate something that has really existed, we forget that this something was brought about not by the desire to imitate but by an unconscious force that itself also is real. But this particular impression that I had been unable to derive from all my desire to taste a delicate pleasure in going out with Rachel, I was now experiencing without having made the slightest effort to procure it, but for quite different reasons, sincere, profound; to take a single instance, for the reason that my jealousy prevented me from letting Albertine out of my sight, and, when I was able to leave the house, from letting her go anywhere without me. I was experiencing it only now, because our knowledge is not of the external objects that we try to observe, but of involuntary sensations, because in the past although a woman might be sitting in the same carriage as myself, she was not *really* by my side, so long as she was not created anew there at every moment by a need for her such as I felt for Albertine, so long as the constant caress of my gaze did not incessantly restore to her those tints that need to be perpetually refreshed, so long as my senses, even if appeased but still endowed with memory, were not aware of the savor and substance beneath those colors, so long as, combined with the senses and with the imagination that exalts them, jealousy was not maintaining that woman in equilibrium by my side by a compensated attraction as powerful as the law of gravity.

Our automobile passed swiftly along the boulevards, the avenues whose lines of hôtels, a rosy congelation of sunshine and cold, reminded me of calling upon Mme Swann in the soft light of her chrysanthemums, before it was time to ring for the lamps. I had barely time to make out, being separated from them by the window of the automobile as effectively as I would have been by that of my bedroom window, a young fruit seller, a

dairymaid, standing in the doorway of her shop, illuminated by the sunshine like a heroine whom my desire was sufficient to launch upon exquisite adventures, on the threshold of a romance that I would never know. For I could not ask Albertine to let me stop, and already the young women were no longer visible whose features my eyes had barely distinguished, barely caressed their fresh complexions in the golden vapor in which they were bathed. The emotion that I felt grip me when I caught sight of a wine-merchant's girl at her counter or a laundress chatting in the street was the emotion that we feel on recognizing a goddess. Now that Olympus no longer exists, its inhabitants dwell upon the earth. And when, in composing a mythological scene, painters have engaged to pose as Venus²³⁸ or Ceres²³⁹ young women of humble birth, who take up the most plebian trades, so far from committing sacrilege, they have merely added, restored to them the quality, the various attributes of which they had been dispossessed.

"What did you think of the Trocadéro, you little gadabout?"

"I'm extremely glad I left there to go out with you. It's by Davioud, I believe."

"But how learned my little Albertine is becoming! Indeed, it was Davioud who built it, but I had forgotten."

"While you are asleep, I read your books, you old lazybones."

"My dear, you are changing so fast and becoming so intelligent" (this was true, but even had it not been true I was not sorry that she should have the satisfaction, lacking others, of saying to herself that at least the time that she spent in my house was not being entirely wasted) "that I don't mind telling you things that would generally be regarded as false and that correspond to a truth for which I am searching. You know what Impressionism is?"

"Of course!"

"Very well then, this is what I mean: you remember the church at Marcouville-l'Orgueilleuse that Elstir disliked because it was new? Isn't it rather a denial of his own Impressionism when he abstracts such buildings from the global impression in which they are included, brings them out of the light in which they are somehow dissolved and scrutinizes, like an archaeologist, their intrinsic merit? When he paints, doesn't a hospital, a school, a poster on a wall have the same value as an inestimable cathedral that stands by their side in a single indivisible image? Remember how the

façade was baked by the sun, how that carved frieze of saints swam upon the sea of light. What does it matter that a building is new, if it appears to be old, or even if it does not! All the poetry that the old quarters contain has been squeezed out to the last drop, but if you look at some of the houses that have been built lately for rich tradesmen, in the new quarters, where the stone is all freshly cut and still too white, don't they seem to rend the torrid air of noon in July, at the hour when the shopkeepers go home to lunch in the suburbs, with a cry as sharp as the odor of the cherries waiting for the meal to begin in the darkened dining room, where the prismatic glass knife-rests project a multicolored fire as beautiful as the windows of Chartres?"²⁴⁰

"How wonderful you are! If I ever do become clever, it will be thanks to you."

"Why, on a fine day, tear your eyes away from the Trocadéro, whose giraffe-neck towers remind one of the Charterhouse of Pavia?"²⁴¹

"It reminded me also, standing up like that on its hill, of a Mantegna²⁴² that you have, I think it's of Saint Sebastian, where in the background there's a city like an amphitheater, and you would swear you saw the Trocadéro."

"There, you see! But how did you come across the Mantegna reproduction? You are amazing!"

We had now reached a more plebeian quarter, and the installation of an ancillary Venus behind each counter made it as it were a suburban altar at the foot of which I would gladly have spent the rest of my life. As one does on the eve of a premature death, I drew up a mental list of the pleasures of which I was deprived by Albertine's setting a full stop to my freedom. At Passy²⁴³ it was in the open street, so crowded were the footways, that some girls, their arms encircling one another's waists, left me marveling at their smiles. I did not have time to see it clearly, but it is hardly probable that I exaggerated it; in any crowd after all, in any crowd of young people, it is not unusual to come upon the effigy of a noble profile. So that these assembled masses on public holidays are to the voluptuary as precious as is to the archaeologist the disordered scramble of a piece of ground in which an excavation will bring to light ancient medals. We arrived at the Bois. I reflected that, if Albertine had not come out with me, I might at this moment, in the Cirque des Champs-Élysées,²⁴⁴ have been hearing the

Wagnerian tempest set all the rigging of the orchestra ascream, draw to itself, like a light spindrift, the tune of the shepherd's pipe that I had just been playing to myself, set it flying, mold it, distort it, divide it, sweep it away in an ever-increasing whirlwind. I was determined, at any rate, that our drive should be short, and that we should return home early, for, without having mentioned it to Albertine, I had decided to go that evening to the Verdurins'. They had recently sent me an invitation, which I had flung into the wastebasket with all the others. But I changed my mind for this evening, for I meant to try to find out who the people were that Albertine might have been hoping to meet there in the afternoon. To tell the truth, I had reached that stage in my relations with Albertine when, if everything remains the same, if things go on normally, a woman ceases to serve us except as a transition to another woman. She still retains a corner in our heart, but a very small corner; we hasten out every evening in search of unknown women, especially unknown women who are known to her and can tell us about her life. Herself, after all, we have possessed, have exhausted everything that she has consented to yield to us of herself. Her life is still herself, but precisely that part of herself that we do not know, the things about which we have questioned her in vain and that we will be able to gather from fresh lips.

If my life with Albertine was to prevent me from going to Venice, from traveling, at least I might in the meantime, had I been alone, have made the acquaintance of the young midinettes scattered about in the sunlight of this fine Sunday, in the sum total of whose beauty I gave a considerable place to the unknown life that animated them. The eyes that we see, are they not shot through by a gaze as to which we do not know what images, memories, expectations, disdains it carries, a gaze from which we cannot separate them? The life that the person who passes by is living, will it not impart, according to what it is, a different value to the knitting of those brows, to the dilatation of those nostrils? Albertine's presence debarred me from going to join them and perhaps also from ceasing to desire them. The man who would maintain in himself the desire to go on living, and his belief in something more delicious than the things of daily life, must go out driving; for the streets, the avenues are full of goddesses. But the goddesses do not allow us to approach them. Here and there, among the trees, at the entrance to some café, a waitress was watching like a nymph on the edge of a sacred grove, while beyond her three girls were seated by the sweeping arc of their

bicycles that were stacked beside them, like three immortals leaning against the clouds or the fabulous coursers upon which they perform their mythological journeys. I noticed that, whenever Albertine looked for a moment at these girls, with a profound attention, she at once turned to gaze at me. But I was not unduly troubled, either by the intensity of this contemplation, or by its brevity for which its intensity compensated; as for the latter, it often happened that Albertine, whether from exhaustion, or because it was an attentive person's way of looking at other people, used to gaze thus in a sort of brown study²⁴⁵ at my father, it might be, or at Françoise; and as for the rapidity with which she turned to look at me, it might be due to the fact that Albertine, knowing my suspicions, might prefer, even if they were not justified, to avoid giving them any foothold. This attention, moreover, which would have seemed to me criminal on Albertine's part (and quite as much so if it had been directed at young men), I fastened upon all the midinettes, without thinking myself reprehensible for an instant, almost deciding indeed that Albertine was reprehensible for preventing me, by her presence, from stopping the car and going to join them. We consider it innocent to desire and atrocious that the other person should desire. And this contrast between what concerns ourselves on the one hand, and on the other the person with whom we are in love, is not confined only to desire, but extends also to lying. What is more usual than a lie, whether it is a question of masking the daily weakness of a constitution that we wish to be thought strong, of concealing a vice, or of going off, without offending others, to the thing that we prefer? It is the most necessary instrument of conversation and the most widely used. But it is this that we actually propose to banish from the life of her whom we love; we watch for it, scent it, detest it everywhere. It upsets us, it is sufficient to bring about a rupture, it seems to us to be concealing the most serious faults, except when it does so effectively conceal them that we do not suspect their existence. A strange state this in which we are so inordinately sensitive to a pathogenic agent whose universal proliferation makes inoffensive to other people and so serious to the wretch who finds that he is no longer immune to it! The life of these pretty girls (because of my long periods of seclusion, I so rarely met any) appeared to me, as to everyone in whom the ease of fulfillment has not destroyed the power of imagining, a thing as different from anything that I knew, as desirable as the most marvelous cities that travel holds in store for us.

The disappointment that I had felt with the women whom I had known, or in the cities that I had visited, did not prevent me from letting myself be caught by the attraction of others or from believing in their reality. Thus, just as seeing Venice—that Venice for which the spring weather too filled me with longing and that marriage with Albertine would prevent me from knowing—seeing Venice in a panorama that Ski²⁴⁶ would perhaps have declared to have more beautiful tones than the place itself, would to me have been no substitute for the journey to Venice, the length of which, determined without my having anything to do with it, seemed to me an indispensable preliminary; similarly, however pretty she might be, the midinette whom a procuress had artificially provided for me could not possibly be a substitute for the one who, with her ungainly figure, was passing at this moment under the trees, laughing with a friend. The girl whom I might find in a house of assignation, were she even prettier than this one, could not be the same thing, because we do not look at the eyes of a girl whom we do not know as we would look at little discs of opal or agate. We know that the little ray that colors them or the diamond dust that makes them sparkle is all that we can see of a mind, a will, a memory in which is contained the family home that we do not know, the intimate friends whom we envy. The enterprise of taking possession of all this, which is so difficult, recalcitrant, is what gives its value to the gaze far more than its merely physical beauty (which may serve to explain why the same young man can awaken a whole romance in the imagination of a woman who has heard somebody say that he is the Prince of Wales,²⁴⁷ whereas she pays no more attention to him after learning that she is mistaken); to find the midinette in the house of assignation is to find her emptied of that unknown life that permeates her and that we aspire to possess with her, it is to approach a pair of eyes that have indeed become mere precious stones, a nose whose quivering is as devoid of meaning as that of a flower. No, that unknown midinette who was passing at that moment, it seemed to me as indispensable, if I wished to continue to believe in her reality, as making a long journey in the train if I wished to believe in the reality of Pisa that I would see and that would not be merely a panoramic show in a World's Fair, to test her resistance by adapting my behavior to it, challenging a rebuff, returning to the charge, obtaining a rendezvous, waiting for her as she left from her work, getting to know, episode by episode, all that composed the girl's life, traversing the space that, for seeking the distance

that her different habits and her special mode of life set between me and the attention, the favor that I wished to attain and capture. But these similarities between desire and travel made me vow to myself that one day I would grasp a little more closely the nature of this force, invisible but as powerful as any belief, or as, in the world of physics, atmospheric pressure, that exalted to such a height cities and women so long as I did not know them and slipped away from beneath them as soon as I had approached them, made them at once collapse and fall flat upon the dead level of the most commonplace reality. Farther along another girl was kneeling beside her bicycle, which she was putting to rights. The repair finished, the young racer mounted her bicycle, but without straddling it as a man would have done. For a moment the bicycle swerved, and the young body seemed to have added to itself a sail, a huge wing; and presently we saw dart away at full speed the young creature half-human, half-winged, angel or peri,²⁴⁸ pursuing her course.

This was what the presence of Albertine, this was precisely what my life with Albertine, deprived me of. Deprived me, did I say? Should I not have thought rather: what it provided for my enjoyment? If Albertine had not been living with me, had been free, I would have imagined, and with reason, every woman to be a possible, a probable object of her desire, of her pleasure. They would have appeared to me like those dancers who, in a diabolical ballet, representing the Temptations to one person, plunge their darts into the heart of another. Midinettes, schoolgirls, actresses, how I would have hated them all! Objects of horror, I would have excluded them from the beauty of the universe. Albertine's servitude, by permitting me not to suffer any longer on their account, restored them to the beauty of the world. Inoffensive, having lost the sting that stabs the heart with jealousy, I was free to admire them, to caress them with my eyes, another day more intimately perhaps. By secluding Albertine, I had at the same time restored to the universe all those iridescent wings that sweep past us in public gardens, ballrooms, theaters, and which became tempting once more to me because she could no longer succumb to their temptation. They composed the beauty of the world. They had at one time composed that of Albertine. It was because I had seen her as a mysterious bird, then as a great actress of the beach, desired, perhaps won, that I had thought her wonderful. As soon as she was a captive in my house, the bird that I had seen one afternoon advancing with measured tread along the esplanade, surrounded by the

congregation of the other girls like seagulls alighted from who knows where,²⁴⁹ Albertine had lost all her colors, together with all the chances that other people had of securing her for themselves. Gradually, she had lost her beauty. It required excursions like this, in which I imagined her, but for my presence, accosted by some woman, or by some young man, to make me see her again amid the splendor of the beach, although my jealousy was on a different plane from the decline of the pleasures of my imagination. But in spite of these abrupt reversions in which, desired by other people, she once more became beautiful in my eyes, I might very well divide her stay with me into two periods: an earlier period in which she was still, although less so every day, the glittering actress of the beach, and the second one in which, become the gray captive, reduced to her drab self, she needed those flashes in which I remembered the past to restore to Albertine her colors.

Sometimes, in the hours in which I felt most indifferent toward her, there came back to me the memory of a far-off moment on the beach, before I had made her acquaintance, not far from a lady with whom I was on bad terms and with whom I was almost certain now that she had had relations, she burst out laughing, staring me in the face in an insolent fashion. All around her hissed the blue and polished sea. In the sunshine of the beach, Albertine, in the midst of her friends, was the most beautiful of them all. She was a splendid girl, who in her familiar setting of boundless waters, had—precious in the eyes of the lady who admired her—inflicted upon me this unpardonable insult. It was unpardonable, for the lady had perhaps returned to Balbec, had noticed perhaps, on the luminous and echoing beach, that Albertine was absent. But she did not know that the girl was living with me, was wholly mine. The vast expanse of blue water, her forgetfulness of the preferences that she had felt for this particular girl and that were being diverted to others, had closed over the outrage that Albertine had done me, enshrining it in a glittering and unbreakable casket. Then hatred of that woman gnawed my heart; of Albertine also, but a hatred mingled with admiration of the beautiful, adulated girl, with her marvelous hair, whose laughter on the beach had been an affront. Shame, jealousy, the memory of my earliest desires and of the brilliant setting, had restored to Albertine her beauty, her worth of former days. And thus there alternated with the somewhat oppressive boredom that I felt in her company a throbbing desire, full of magnificent images and of regrets; according to whether she was by my side in my bedroom or I set her free in my memory, on the esplanade, in

her gay seaside frocks, to the sound of the musical instruments of the sea—Albertine, now extracted from that environment, possessed and of no great value, now plunged back into it, escaping from me into a past that I would never be able to know, offending me in the presence of the lady who was her friend, as much as the splash of the wave or the dazzling glare of the sun—Albertine restored to the beach or brought back again to my room, in a sort of amphibious love.

Farther on, a numerous band was playing ball. All these girls had come out to make the most of the sunshine, for these days in February, even when they are so dazzling, do not last long and the splendor of their light does not postpone the hour of its decline. Before that hour drew near, we passed some time in twilight, because after we had driven as far as the Seine, where Albertine admired, and by her presence prevented me from admiring, the reflections of red sails upon the wintry blue of the water, a house with a tiled roof in the distance like a single red poppy against the clear horizon, of which Saint-Cloud seemed, farther off again, to be the fragmentary, friable, ribbed petrification, we left our automobile and walked a long way together. For some moments I even gave her my arm, and it seemed to me that the ring that her arm formed around it united our two persons in a single self and linked our separate destinies together. At our feet, our parallel shadows, where they approached and joined, traced an exquisite pattern. No doubt it already seemed to me a marvelous thing that, at home, Albertine should be living with me, that it should be she who came and lay down on my bed. But it was so to speak the transportation of that marvel out of doors, into the heart of nature, that by the shore of that lake in the Bois, of which I was so fond, beneath the trees, it should be her and none but her shadow, the pure and simplified shadow of her leg, of her bust, that the sun had to depict in monochrome by the side of mine upon the gravel of the path. And I found a charm that was more immaterial doubtless, but no less intimate, than in the drawing together, the fusion of our bodies, in that of our shadows. Then we returned to the car. And it chose, for our homeward journey, a succession of little winding lanes along which the wintry trees, clothed, like ruins, in ivy and brambles, seemed to be pointing the way to the dwelling of some magician. No sooner had we emerged from their dusky cover than we found, upon leaving the Bois, the daylight still so bright that I imagined that I would still have time to do everything that I wanted to do before dinner, when, only a few minutes later, at the moment when our car approached the

Arc de Triomphe,²⁵⁰ it was with a sudden start of surprise and dismay that I perceived, over Paris, the moon prematurely full, like the face of a clock that has stopped and makes us think that we are late for an engagement. We had told the driver to take us home. To Albertine, this meant also coming to my home. The presence of those women, however dear to us, who are obliged to leave us and return home, does not bestow the peace that I found in the presence of Albertine seated in the car by my side, a presence that was conveying us not to the void of the hours in which lovers have to part but to an even more stable and more sheltered union in my home, which was also hers, the material symbol of my possession of her. To be sure, in order to possess, one must first have desired. We do not possess a line, a surface, a mass unless it is occupied by our love. But Albertine had not been for me during our drive, as Rachel had been in the past, a futile dust of flesh and clothing. The imagination of my eyes, my lips, my hands had at Balbec so solidly built, so tenderly polished her body that now in this car, to touch that body, to contain it, I had no need to press my own body against Albertine, nor even to see her; it was enough to hear her, and if she was silent to know that she was by my side; my interwoven senses enveloped her completely and when, as we arrived at the front door, she quite naturally alighted, I stopped for a moment to tell the chauffeur to call for me later on, but my gaze enveloped her still while she passed ahead of me under the arch, and it was still the same inert, domestic calm that I felt as I saw her thus, solid, flushed, opulent and captive, returning home quite naturally with me, as a woman who was mine, and, protected by its walls, disappearing into our house.

Unfortunately, she seemed to feel herself a prisoner there, and to share the opinion of that Mme de La Rochefoucauld²⁵¹ who, when somebody asked her whether she was not glad to live in so beautiful a home as Liancourt,²⁵² replied: "There is no such thing as a beautiful prison," if I was to judge by her sad, weary expression that evening as we dined together in her room. I did not notice it at first; and it was I who was made wretched by the thought that, if it had not been for Albertine (for with her I would have suffered too acutely from jealousy in a hotel where all day long she would have been exposed to contact with a crowd of strangers), I might at that moment be dining in Venice in one of those little restaurants, barrel-vaulted

like the hold of a ship, from which one looks out on the Grand Canal through arched windows framed in Moorish moldings.

I ought to add that Albertine greatly admired in my room a big bronze by Barbedienne,²⁵³ which, with ample justification, Bloch considered extremely ugly. He had perhaps less reason to be surprised at my having kept it. I had never sought, like him, to furnish for artistic effect, to compose my surroundings, I was too lazy, too indifferent to the things that I was in the habit of seeing every day. Since my taste was not involved, I had a right not to harmonize my interiors. I might perhaps, even without that, have discarded the bronze. But ugly and expensive things are very useful, for they possess, in the eyes of people who do not understand us, who do not have our taste and with whom we may be in love, a prestige that may be lacking in some fine object that does not reveal its beauty. Now the people who do not understand us are precisely the people with regard to whom alone it may be useful to employ a prestige that among superior people our intellect is sufficient to earn us. Albertine might indeed be beginning to show taste, but she still felt a certain respect for the bronze, and this respect was reflected upon me in a consideration that, coming from Albertine, mattered infinitely more to me than the question of keeping a bronze that was a trifle degrading, since I loved Albertine.

But the thought of my bondage ceased of a sudden to weigh upon me and I looked forward to prolonging it still further, because I seemed to perceive that Albertine was painfully conscious of her own. True that whenever I had asked her whether she was unhappy in my house, she had always replied that she did not know where she could possibly be happier. But often these words were contradicted by an air of nervous exhaustion, of longing to escape. Certainly, if she had the tastes with which I had credited her, this prevention from ever satisfying them must have been as exasperating to her as it was calming to me, calming to such an extent that I should have decided that the hypothesis of my having accused her unjustly was the most probable, had it not been so difficult to fit into this hypothesis the extraordinary pains that Albertine took never to be alone, never to be free, never to stop for a moment outside the front door when she came in, to insist upon being conspicuously accompanied, whenever she went to the telephone, by someone who would be able to repeat to me what she had said, by Françoise or Andrée, always to leave me alone with the latter (without appearing to be doing so on purpose), after they had been out

together, so that I might obtain a detailed report of their outing. With this marvelous docility were contrasted certain quickly repressed starts of impatience, which made me ask myself whether Albertine was not planning to cast off her chain.

Certain chance encounters seemed to corroborate my supposition. Thus, one day when I had gone out by myself, and having met Gisèle near Passy, we chatted about one thing and another. Presently, not without pride at being able to do so, I told her that I was constantly seeing Albertine. Gisèle asked me where she could find her, since she *just*²⁵⁴ happened to have something to tell her. “Why, what is it?” “Something to do with some young friends of hers.” “What friends? I may perhaps be able to tell you, though that need not prevent you from seeing her.” “Oh, girls she knew years ago, I don’t remember their names,” Gisèle replied vaguely, beating a retreat. She left me, supposing herself to have spoken with such prudence that the whole story must seem to me perfectly straightforward. But falsehood is so unexacting, needs so little help to make itself manifest! If it had been a question of friends of long ago, whose very names she no longer remembered, why did she “*just*” happen to need to speak about them to Albertine? This “*just*,” akin to an expression dear to Mme Cottard: “It couldn’t come at a better time,” could be applicable only to something particular, opportune, perhaps urgent, relating to definite persons. Besides, something about the way she opened her mouth, as though she were going to yawn, with a vague expression, as she said to me (almost drawing back her body, as though she began to reverse her engine at this point in our conversation): “Oh, I don’t know, I don’t remember their names,” made her face, and in harmony with it her voice, as clear a picture of falsehood as the wholly different air, tense, animated, of her previous “*just*” was of truth. I did not question Gisèle. Of what use would it have been to me? Certainly, she was not lying in the same fashion as Albertine. And certainly Albertine’s lies pained me more. But they had obviously a point in common: the fact of the lie itself, which in certain cases is self-evident. Not evidence of the truth that the lie conceals. We know that each murderer, privately, imagines that he has arranged everything so cleverly that he will not be caught; in fact murderers are almost always caught. On the contrary, liars are rarely caught, and among liars, more particularly the woman with whom we are in love. We do not know where she has been, what she has been doing. But at the very moment when she speaks, when she speaks of

something else beneath which lies hidden the thing that she does not mention, the lie is immediately perceived, and our jealousy increased, since we are conscious of the lie, and cannot succeed in discovering the truth. With Albertine, the impression that she was lying was conveyed by many of the peculiarities that we have already observed in the course of this narrative, but especially by this, that, when she was lying, her story broke down either from inadequacy, omission, improbability, or, on the contrary, from a surfeit of petty details intended to make it seem plausible. Plausibility, notwithstanding the idea that the liar has formed of it, is by no means the same as truth. Whenever, while listening to something that is true, we hear something that is only probable, which is perhaps more so than the truth, which is perhaps too probable, the ear that is at all musical senses that it is not correct, as with a line that does not scan or a word read aloud in mistake for another. Our ear senses this, and if we are in love our heart takes alarm. Why do we not reflect at the time, when we change the whole course of our life because we do not know whether a woman went along the rue de Berri²⁵⁵ or the rue Washington,²⁵⁶ why do we not reflect that these few hundred yards of difference, and the woman herself, will be reduced to the hundred millionth part of themselves (that is to say to dimensions far beneath our perception), if we only have the wisdom to remain for a few years without seeing the woman, and that she who has out-Gullivered Gulliver²⁵⁷ in our eyes will shrink to a Lilliputian whom no microscope—of the heart, at least, for that of the disinterested memory is more powerful and less fragile—can ever again perceive! However that may be, if there was a point in common—the lie itself—between Albertine's lies and Gisèle's, still Gisèle did not lie in the same way as Albertine, nor indeed in the same way as Andrée, but their respective lies dovetailed so neatly into one another, while presenting a great variety, that the little band had the impenetrable solidity of certain commercial houses, booksellers for example, or newspaper publishers, where the wretched author will never succeed, notwithstanding the diversity of the persons employed in them, in discovering whether or not he is being swindled. The director of the newspaper or review lies with an attitude of sincerity all the more solemn in that he is frequently obliged to conceal the fact that he himself does exactly the same things and indulges in the same commercial practices that he denounced in other newspaper or theatrical directors, in other publishers, when he chose as his banner, when he raised against them

the standard of Honesty. The fact of a man's having proclaimed (as leader of a political party, or in any other capacity) that it is wicked to lie, obliges him as a rule to lie more than other people, without on that account abandoning the solemn mask, doffing the august tiara of sincerity. The "honest" gentleman's partner lies in a different and more ingenuous fashion. He deceives his author as he deceives his wife, with tricks from the vaudeville stage. The managing editor, a blunt and honest man, lies quite simply, like an architect who promises that your house will be ready at a date when it will not have been begun. The editor, an angelic soul, flutters from one to another of the three, and without knowing what the matter is, gives them, by a brotherly scruple and out of affectionate solidarity, the precious support of a word that is above suspicion. These four persons live in a state of perpetual dissension to which the arrival of the author puts a stop. Over and above their private quarrels, each of them remembers the paramount military duty of rallying to the support of the threatened "corps." Without realizing it, I had long been playing the part of this author among the little band. If Gisèle had been thinking, when she used the word "just," of some one of Albertine's friends who was proposing to go abroad with her as soon as my mistress should have found some pretext or other for leaving me, and had meant to warn Albertine that the hour had now come or would shortly strike, she, Gisèle, would have let herself be torn to pieces rather than tell me so; it was quite useless therefore to ply her with questions.

Meetings such as the one with Gisèle were not alone in accentuating my doubts. For example, I admired Albertine's paintings. Albertine's paintings, the touching distractions of the captive, moved me so that I congratulated her upon them. "No, they're dreadfully bad, but I've never had a drawing lesson in my life." "But one evening at Balbec you sent word to me that you had stayed at home to have a drawing lesson." I reminded her of the day and told her that I had realized at the time that people did not have drawing lessons at that hour in the evening. Albertine blushed. "It is true," she said, "I was not having drawing lessons, I told you a great many lies at the beginning, that I admit. But I never lie to you now." I would so much have liked to know what were the many lies that she had told me at the beginning! But I knew beforehand that her answers would be new lies. And so I contented myself with kissing her. I asked her to tell me just one of those lies. She replied: "Oh, well; for example when I said that the sea air

was bad for me.” I ceased to insist in the face of this unwillingness to reveal.

Every person whom we love, indeed to a certain extent every person is to us like Janus,²⁵⁸ presenting to us a face that pleases us if that person leaves us, a mournful face if we know him or her to be perpetually at our disposal. In the case of Albertine, the prospect of her continued society was painful to me in another way that I cannot explain in this narrative. It is terrible to have the life of another person attached to our own like a bomb that we hold in our hands, unable to get rid of it without committing a crime. But let us take as a comparison the ups and downs, the dangers, the anxieties, the fear that false and probable things will be believed in time to come when we will no longer be able to explain them, feelings that one experiences if one lives in the intimate society of a madman. For example, I pitied M. de Charlus for living with Morel (immediately the memory of the scene that afternoon made me feel that the left side of my chest was heavier than the other); leaving aside the relations that may or may not have existed between them, M. de Charlus must have been unaware at the outset that Morel was mad. Morel’s beauty, his stupidity, his pride must have deterred the baron from exploring so deeply, until the days of melancholy when Morel accused M. de Charlus of responsibility for his sorrows, without being able to furnish any explanation, abused him for his lack of confidence with the aid of false but extremely subtle reasoning, threatened him with desperate resolutions, while throughout all this there persisted the most cunning regard for his own most immediate interests. But all this is only a comparison. Albertine was not mad.

To make her chain appear lighter, the clever thing seemed to me to make her believe that I was myself about to break it. In any case, I could not at that moment confide this mendacious plan to her, since she had been too kind in returning from the Trocadéro that afternoon; what I could do, far from distressing her with the threat of a separation, was at the most to keep to myself those dreams of a perpetual life together that my grateful heart kept forming. As I looked at her, I found it hard to restrain myself from pouring them out to her, and she may perhaps have noticed this. Unfortunately, the expression of such dreams is not contagious. The case of an affected old woman like M. de Charlus who, by dint of never seeing in his imagination anything but a proud young man, thinks that he has himself become a proud young man, all the more so the more affected and

ridiculous he becomes, this case is more general, and it is the misfortune of an impassioned lover that he does not take into account the fact that while he sees in front of him a beautiful face, his mistress is seeing his face, which is not made any more beautiful, far from it, when it is distorted by the pleasure that is aroused in it by the sight of beauty. Nor indeed does love exhaust the generality of this case; we do not see our own body, which other people see, and we “follow” our own train of thought, the object, invisible to other people, which is before our eyes. This object the artist does sometimes enable us to see in his work. Whence it arises that the admirers of his work are disappointed in its author, upon whose face that inner beauty is imperfectly reflected.²⁵⁹

Retaining from my dream of Venice only what related to Albertine and might sweeten the time she spent in my house, I spoke to her about a Fortuny dressing gown that we needed to go and order someday soon. I was looking for new pleasures that might distract her. I would have liked to surprise her by giving her—had it been possible to find any—pieces of old French silver. In fact, when we had planned to buy a yacht—a plan that Albertine judged impracticable, as I did also whenever I believed her virtuous and life with her began to appear as ruinous as marriage to her impossible—we had, not that she supposed that we would ever have a yacht, asked advice from Elstir.

I learned that a death had occurred during that day, which distressed me greatly, that of Bergotte. It was known that he had been ill for a long time. Not, of course, with the illness from which he had suffered originally and which was natural. Nature hardly seems capable of giving us any but very short illnesses. But medicine has annexed the art of prolonging them. Remedies, the respite that they procure, the relapses that a temporary cessation of them provokes, create a simulacrum of illness to which the patient grows so accustomed that he ends by stabilizing it, making it permanent, just as children continue to give way to fits of coughing long after they have been cured of the whooping cough. Then the remedies begin to have less effect, the doses are increased, they cease to do any good, but they have begun to do harm thanks to that lasting indisposition. Nature would not have offered them so long a tenure. It is a great wonder that medicine can almost equal nature in forcing a man to remain in bed, to continue on pain of death the use of some drug. From that moment the illness artificially grafted has taken root, has become a secondary but a

genuine illness, with this difference only, that natural illnesses are cured, but never those that medicine creates, for it does not know the secret of their cure.

For years past Bergotte had ceased to go out of doors. Moreover, he had never cared for society, or had cared for it for a day only, to despise it as he despised everything else and in the same fashion, which was his own, namely, to despise a thing not because it was beyond his reach but as soon as he had attained it. He lived so simply that nobody suspected how rich he was, and anyone who had known would still have been mistaken, having thought him to be a miser, whereas no one was ever more generous. He was generous above all toward women—girls, one ought rather to say—who were ashamed to receive so much in return for so little. He excused himself in his own eyes because he knew that he could never produce such good work as in an atmosphere of amorous feelings. Love is too strong a word, pleasure that is at all deeply rooted in the flesh is helpful to literary work because it cancels all other pleasures, for example the pleasures of society, those that are the same for everyone. And even if this love leads to disillusionment, it does at least stir, even by so doing, the surface of the soul that otherwise would be in danger of becoming stagnant. Desire is therefore not without its value to the writer in detaching him first of all from his fellow men and from conforming to their standards, and afterward in restoring some degree of movement to a spiritual machine which, after a certain age, tends to become paralyzed. We do not succeed in being happy, but we observe the reasons that prevent us from being happy and that would have remained invisible to us but for these sudden loopholes opened by disappointment. And dreams, of course, cannot be converted into reality, that we know; we would not form any, perhaps, were it not for desire, and it is useful to us to form them in order to see them fail and to be instructed by their failure. And so Bergotte said to himself: “I am spending more than a multimillionaire would spend on girls, but the pleasures or disappointments that they give me make me write a book that brings me money.” Economically, this argument was absurd, but no doubt he found some charm in thus transmuting gold into caresses and caresses into gold. We saw, at the time of my grandmother’s death, how a weary old age loves repose. Now in society, there is nothing but conversation. It may be stupid, but it has the capacity to eliminate women who are nothing more than

questions and answers. Removed from society, women become once more what is so reposeful to a weary old man, an object of contemplation.

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In any case, now there was no longer a question of anything of this sort. I have said that Bergotte never went out of doors, and when he got out of bed for an hour in his room, he would be smothered in shawls, lap robes, all the things with which a person covers himself before exposing himself to intense cold or getting on a train. He would apologize to the few friends whom he allowed to penetrate to his sanctuary, and, pointing to his tartan plaids, his traveling blankets, would say merrily: "After all, my dear fellow, life, as Anaxagoras has said, is a journey."²⁶⁰ Thus he went on growing steadily colder, a tiny planet that offered a prophetic image of the greater, when gradually heat will withdraw from the earth, then life itself. Then the resurrection will have come to an end, for if, among future generations, the works of men are to shine, there must first of all be men. If certain species of animals hold out longer against the invading cold, when there are no longer any men, and if we suppose Bergotte's fame to have lasted until then, suddenly it will be extinguished for all time. It will not be the last animals that will read him, for it is scarcely probable that, like the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost,²⁶¹ they will be able to understand the speech of the various races of mankind without having learned it.

In the months that preceded his death, Bergotte suffered from insomnia, and what was worse, whenever he did fall asleep, from nightmares which, if he awoke, made him reluctant to go to sleep again. He had long been a lover of dreams, even of bad dreams, because thanks to them and to the contradiction they present to the reality that we have before us in our waking state, they give us, at the moment of waking if not before, the profound sensation of having slept. But Bergotte's nightmares were not like that. When he spoke of nightmares, he used in the past to mean unpleasant things that passed through his brain. Recently, it was as though proceeding from somewhere outside himself that he would see a hand armed with a damp cloth which, passed over his face by an evil woman, kept scrubbing him awake, an intolerable itching in his thighs, the rage—because Bergotte had murmured in his sleep that he was driving badly—of a raving lunatic of a cabman who flung himself upon the writer, biting and gnawing his fingers. Finally, as soon as in his sleep it had grown sufficiently dark, nature arranged a sort of undress rehearsal of the apoplectic stroke that was to carry him off: Bergotte arrived in a carriage beneath the porch of Swann's new hôtel and tried to alight. A stunning giddiness glued him to his seat, the concierge came forward to help him out of the carriage, he remained seated,

unable to rise, to straighten his legs. He tried to pull himself up by holding onto the stone pillar that was by his side, but did not find sufficient support in it to enable him to stand. He consulted doctors who, flattered at being called in by him, saw in his virtue as an incessant worker (it was twenty years since he had written anything), in his overwork, the cause of his ailments. They advised him not to read terrifying stories (he never read anything), to benefit more by the sunshine, which was “indispensable to life” (he had owed a few years of comparative health only to his seclusion at home), to take more nourishment (which made him thinner, and nourished nothing but his nightmares). One of his doctors was blessed with the spirit of contradiction, and whenever Bergotte consulted him in the absence of the others, and, in order not to offend him, suggested to him as his own ideas what the others had advised, this doctor, thinking that Bergotte was seeking to have prescribed for him something that he liked, at once forbade it, and often for reasons invented so hurriedly to make the case that in face of the material objections that Bergotte raised, this doctor, while contradicting him, was obliged in the same sentence to contradict himself, but, for new reasons, repeated the original prohibition. Bergotte returned to one of the first of these doctors, a man who prided himself on his wit, especially in the presence of one of the leading men of letters, and who, if Bergotte insinuated: “I seem to remember, though, that Dr. X told me—long ago, of course—that that might congest my kidneys and brain . . .” would smile sardonically, raise his finger and announce: “I said use, I did not say abuse. Naturally every remedy, if one takes it in excess, becomes a double-edged sword.” There is in the human body a certain instinct for what is beneficial to us, as there is in the heart for what is our moral duty, an instinct that no authorization by a doctor of medicine or divinity can replace. We know that cold baths are bad for us, we like them, we can always find a doctor to recommend them, not to prevent them from doing us harm. From each of these doctors Bergotte took something that, in his own wisdom, he had forbidden himself for years past. After a few weeks, his old troubles had reappeared, the new had become worse. Maddened by relentless pain, to which was added insomnia broken only by brief spells of nightmare, Bergotte called in no more doctors and tried with success, but to excess, different narcotics, confidently reading the prospectus that accompanied each of them, a prospectus that proclaimed the necessity of sleep but hinted that all the preparations that induce it (except

the one contained in the bottle around which the prospectus was wrapped, which never produced any toxic effect) were toxic, and therefore made the remedy worse than the disease. Bergotte tried them all. Some are of a different family from those to which we are accustomed, derived, for example, from amyl and ethyl. When we absorb a new drug, entirely different in composition, it is always with a delicious expectancy of the unknown. Our heart beats as at a first rendezvous. To what unknown forms of sleep, of dreams, is the newcomer going to lead us? He is inside us now, he has control of our thoughts. In what manner are we going to fall asleep? And, once we are asleep, by what strange paths, up to what peaks, into what unfathomed gulfs will the all-powerful master lead us? With what new grouping of sensations are we to become acquainted on this journey? Will it lead us to illness? To blissful happiness? To death? Bergotte's death had come to him the day after he had thus entrusted himself to one of these friends (a friend? or an enemy, rather?) who proved too strong for him.

The circumstances of his death were as follows. An attack of uremia, by no means serious, had led to his being ordered to rest. But an art critic having written that in Vermeer's *View of Delft* (lent by the Gallery at The Hague for an exhibition of Dutch painting),²⁶² a painting that he adored and imagined that he knew so well, a little patch of yellow wall (which he could not remember) was so well painted that it was, if one looked at it by itself, like some priceless specimen of Chinese art, of a beauty that was sufficient in itself, Bergotte ate a few potatoes, left the house, and went to the exhibition.²⁶³ At the first few steps that he had to climb he was overcome by dizziness. He passed in front of several paintings and was struck by the dryness and futility of such factitious art, nothing of which equaled the fresh air and sunshine of a Venetian palazzo, or of an ordinary house by the sea. At last he came to the Vermeer which he remembered as more striking, more different from anything else that he knew, but in which, thanks to the critic's article, he noticed for the first time some small figures in blue, that the sand was pink, and finally the precious substance of the tiny patch of yellow wall. His dizziness increased; he fixed his eyes, like a child upon a yellow butterfly that he is trying to catch, upon the precious little patch of wall. "That is how I ought to have written," he said. "My last books are too dry,²⁶⁴ I ought to have gone over them with several layers of color, made my language precious in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall."

Meanwhile he was not unconscious of the gravity of his condition. In a celestial pair of scales there appeared to him, tipping one of its pans, his own life, while the other contained the little patch of wall so beautifully painted in yellow. He felt that he had rashly sacrificed the former for the latter. "All the same," he said to himself, "I have no wish to provide the 'brief news item' of this exhibition for the evening papers." He repeated to himself: "Little patch of yellow wall, with a sloping roof, little patch of yellow wall." While doing so he sank down upon a circular divan; and then at once he ceased to think that his life was in jeopardy and, reverting to his natural optimism, told himself: "It is just an ordinary indigestion from those potatoes; they weren't cooked enough; it's nothing." A new attack beat him down; he rolled from the divan to the floor, as visitors and attendants came hurrying to his assistance. He was dead. Dead forever?²⁶⁵ Who can say? Certainly, our experiments in spiritualism prove no more than the dogmas of religion that the soul survives death. All that we can say is that everything is arranged in this life as though we entered it carrying the burden of obligations contracted in a former life; there is no reason inherent in the conditions of life on this earth that can make us consider ourselves obliged to do good, to be considerate, to be polite even, nor make the atheist artist consider himself obliged to begin over again a score of times a piece of work the admiration aroused by which will matter little to his body devoured by worms, like the patch of yellow wall painted with so much knowledge and skill by an artist who must forever remain unknown and is barely identified under the name Vermeer. All these obligations that do not have their sanction in our present life seem to belong to a different world, founded upon goodness, scrupulosity, self-sacrifice, a world entirely different from this, and which we leave in order to be born on this earth, before perhaps returning to the other to live once again beneath the sway of those unknown laws that we have obeyed because we bore their precepts in our hearts, knowing not whose hand had traced them there—those laws to which every profound work of the intellect brings us nearer and which are invisible only—and still!—to fools. So that the idea that Bergotte was not dead forever is by no means improbable.

They buried him, but all through the night of mourning, in the lighted shop windows, his books arranged three by three kept watch like angels with outspread wings and seemed, for him who was no more, the symbol of his resurrection.

I learned, I have said, that day that Bergotte was dead. And I marveled at the inaccuracy of the newspapers, which—each of them reproducing the same paragraph—stated that he had died the day before. For, the day before, Albertine had met him, as she informed me that very evening, and indeed that had made her a little late in coming home, for she had stopped for some time talking to him. She was doubtless the last person to whom he had spoken. She knew him through me who had long ceased to see him, but, as she had been eager to make his acquaintance, I had, a year earlier, written to ask the old master whether I might bring her to see him. He had granted my request, a trifle hurt, I believe, that I should be visiting him only to give pleasure to another person, which was a confirmation of my indifference to him. These cases are frequent: sometimes the man or woman whom we implore to receive us not for the pleasure of conversing with them again, but on behalf of a third person, refuses so obstinately that our protégée concludes that we have boasted of an influence that we do not possess; more often the man of genius or the famous beauty consents, but, humiliated in their glory, wounded in their affection, feels for us afterward only a diminished, sorrowful, almost contemptuous attachment. I discovered long after this that I had wrongly accused the newspapers of inaccuracy, since on the day in question Albertine had not met Bergotte. But at the time I had never suspected this for a single instant, so naturally had she told me of the incident, and it was not until much later that I discovered her charming skill in lying with simplicity. The things that she said, the things that she confessed were so stamped with the character of formal evidence—what we see, what we learn from an irrefutable source—that she sowed thus in the empty spaces of her life episodes of another life the falsity of which I did not then suspect. There is moreover ample room for discussion about the word “falsity.” The universe is real for us all and dissimilar to each of us. The evidence of my senses, if I had been in the street at that moment, would perhaps have informed me that the lady had not been with Albertine. But if I had knowledge of the fact, it was by one of those chains of reasoning in which the words of people in whom we have confidence insert strong links, and not by the evidence of my senses. To invoke this evidence of the senses I would have had to be in the street at that particular moment, and I had not been. We may imagine, however, that such a hypothesis is not improbable: I might have gone out and have been passing along the street at the time at which Albertine was to tell me in the

evening (not having seen me there) that she had gone a little way with the lady, and I would then have known that Albertine was lying. But is that quite certain even then? The evidence of the senses is also an operation of the mind in which conviction creates the evidence. We have often seen her sense of hearing convey to Françoise not the word that was uttered but what she thought to be its correct form, which was enough to prevent her from hearing the correction implied in a superior pronunciation. Our butler was cast in a similar mold. M. de Charlus was in the habit of wearing at this time—for he was constantly changing—very light-colored trousers that were recognizable a mile off. Now our butler, who thought that the word *pissoitière*²⁶⁶ (the word denoting what M. de Rambuteau²⁶⁷ had been so annoyed to hear the Duc de Guermantes call a Rambuteau stall) was really *pistière*, never once in the whole of his life heard a single person say *pissoitière*, albeit the word was frequently pronounced thus in his hearing. But error is more obstinate than faith and does not examine the grounds of its belief. Constantly the butler would say: “I’m sure M. le Baron de Charlus must have caught a disease to stand about as long as he does in a *pistière*. That’s what comes of running after women at his age. You can tell what he is by his trousers.”²⁶⁸ This morning, Madame sent me with a message to Neuilly.²⁶⁹ As I passed the *pistière* in the rue de Bourgogne²⁷⁰ I saw M. le Baron de Charlus go in. When I came back from Neuilly, at least an hour later, I saw his yellow trousers in the same *pistière*, in the same place, in the middle stall where he always goes so that people won’t see him.” I can think of no one more beautiful, more noble or more youthful than a certain niece of Mme de Guermantes. But I have heard the concierge of a restaurant where I used sometimes to dine say as she went by: “Just look at that old trollop, what a sight! And she must be eighty, if she’s a day.” As far as age went, I find it difficult to believe that he meant what he said. But the bellhops clustered around him, and who snickered whenever she went past the hotel on her way to visit, at their house in the neighborhood, her charming great-aunts, Mmes de Fezensac²⁷¹ and de Bellery, saw upon the face of the young beauty the fourscore years with which, seriously or not, the concierge had endowed the “old trollop.” You would have made them shriek with laughter had you told them that she was more distinguished than one of the two cashiers of the hotel, who, devoured by eczema, ridiculously stout, seemed to them a fine-looking woman.

Perhaps sexual desire alone would have been capable of preventing their error from taking form, if it had been brought to bear upon the passage of the alleged old trollop, and if the bellhops had suddenly begun to covet the young goddess. But for reasons unknown, which were most probably of a social nature, this desire had not come into play.

But I might have gone out and passed along the street at the time when Albertine was to tell me that evening (not having seen me) that she had walked a little way with the lady. A deplorable obscurity would have clouded my mind, I would have begun to doubt whether I had seen her alone, I would barely have sought to understand by what optical illusion I had failed to perceive the lady, and would not have been greatly surprised to find myself mistaken, for the stellar universe is not so difficult to understand as the real actions of other people, especially of the people we love, fortified as they are against our doubts by fables devised for their protection. For how many years on end can they not allow our apathetic love to believe that they have in some foreign country a sister, a brother, a sister-in-law who have never existed! If we were not obliged, to preserve the continuity of our story, to confine ourselves to frivolous reasons, how many more serious reasons would enable us to demonstrate the mendacious flimsiness of the opening pages of this volume in which, from my bed, I hear the world awake, now to one sort of weather, now to another! Yes, I have been forced to whittle down the facts, and to be a liar, but it is not one universe, there are millions, almost as many as the number of human eyes and brains in existence, that awake every morning.

To return to Albertine, I have never known any woman more amply endowed than herself with the happy aptitude for a lie that is animated, colored with the selfsame tints of life, unless it be one of her friends—one of my blossoming girls also, rose-pink as Albertine, but one whose irregular profile, concave in one place, then protruding, then concave again, was exactly like certain clusters of pink flowers the name of which I have forgotten, but which have long and sinuous concavities. This girl was, from the point of view of fabrications, superior to Albertine, for she never introduced any of those painful moments, those furious innuendoes, which were frequent with my mistress. I have said, however, that she was charming when she invented a story that left no room for doubt, for one saw then in front of her the thing—albeit imaginary—that she was saying, using it as an illustration of her speech. That was my actual perception.

I have added “what she admitted,” for the following reason. Sometimes a casual meeting gave me a jealous suspicion in which by her side there figured in the past, or alas in the future, another person. In order to appear certain of my facts, I would mention the person’s name and Albertine would say: “Yes, I met her, a week ago, just outside the house. I had to be polite and answer her when she spoke to me. I walked a little way with her. But there never has been anything between us. There never will be.” Now Albertine had not even met this person, for the simple reason that the person had not been in Paris for the last ten months. But my mistress felt that a complete denial would sound hardly probable. Whence this fictitious brief encounter, related so simply that I could see the lady stop, bid her good day, walk a little way with her. Plausibility alone inspired Albertine, never the desire to make me jealous. For Albertine, without perhaps any material interest, liked people to be polite to her. And if in the course of this work I have had and will have many occasions to show how jealousy intensifies love, it is the lover’s point of view that I have adopted. But if that lover has a little pride, and though he were to die of a separation, he will not respond to a supposed betrayal with kindness, he will turn away, or without leaving will force himself to assume a mask of coldness. And so it is entirely to her own disadvantage that his mistress makes him suffer so acutely. If, on the contrary, she dispels with a tactful word, with loving caresses, the suspicions that have been torturing him for all his show of indifference, no doubt the lover does not feel that despairing increase of love to which jealousy drives him, but ceasing in an instant to suffer, happy, affectionate, relaxed as one is after a storm when the rain has stopped and one hears only at long intervals from the tall horse-chestnut trees the splash of the suspended drops that already the reappearing sun has dyed with color, he does not know how to express his gratitude to her who has cured him. Albertine knew that I liked to reward her for her kindnesses, and this perhaps explained why she used to invent, to exculpate herself, confessions as natural as these stories the truth of which I never doubted, one of them being that of her meeting with Bergotte when he was already dead. Previously I had never known any of Albertine’s lies save those that, at Balbec, for example, Françoise used to report to me, which I have omitted from these pages although they hurt me so: “As she didn’t want to come, she said to me: ‘Couldn’t you say to Monsieur that you didn’t find me, that

I had gone out?’” But our “inferiors,” who love us as Françoise loved me, take pleasure in wounding us in our self-esteem.

After dinner, I told Albertine that, since I was out of bed, I might as well take the opportunity to go and see some of my friends, Mme de Villeparisis, Mme de Guermantes, the Cambremers, anyone in short whom I might find at home. I omitted to mention only the people whom I did intend to see, the Verdurins. I asked her if she would not come with me. She pleaded that she had no suitable clothes. “Besides, my hair is so awful. Do you really want me to go on doing it like this?” And by way of farewell she held out her hand to me in that brusque fashion, the arm outstretched, the shoulders thrust back, which she used to adopt on the beach at Balbec and had since then entirely abandoned. This forgotten gesture transformed the body that it animated into that of the Albertine who as yet scarcely knew me. It restored to Albertine, ceremonious beneath an air of brusqueness, her original novelty, her mystery, even the setting. I saw the sea behind this girl whom I had never seen shake hands with me in this way since I was at the seaside. “My aunt thinks it makes me older,” she added with a sullen air. “Oh that her aunt may be right!” thought I. “That Albertine by looking like a child should make Mme Bontemps appear younger than she is, is all that her aunt would ask, and also that Albertine will cost her nothing between now and the day when, by marrying me, she will repay what has been spent on her.” But that Albertine should appear less young, less pretty, should turn fewer heads in the street, that is what I, on the contrary, hoped. For the age of a duenna is less reassuring to a jealous lover than the age of the face of the woman he loves. I regretted only that the style in which I had asked her to do her hair should appear to Albertine an additional bolt on the door of her prison. And it was henceforward this new domestic sentiment that never ceased, even when I was away from Albertine, to form a bond attaching me to her.

I said to Albertine, who was not in the mood, or so she told me, to accompany me to the Guermantes’ or the Cambremers’, that I could not be certain where I would go and set off for the Verdurins’. At the moment when I was leaving to go to the Verdurins’ and when the thought of the concert that I was going to hear brought back to my mind the scene that afternoon: “*Grand pied-de-grue, grand pied-de-grue*”—a scene of disappointed love, of jealous love perhaps, but also as bestial as the scene to

which a woman might be subjected by, so to speak, an orangutan that was, if one may use the expression, in love with her—at the moment when, having reached the street, I was just going to hail a fiacre, I heard the sounds of sobs that a man who was sitting on a curbstone was trying to stifle. I came nearer; the man, who had buried his face in his hands, appeared to be quite young, and I was surprised to see, from the gleam of white in the opening of his cloak, that he appeared to be wearing evening clothes and a white tie. On hearing me, he uncovered a face bathed in tears, but at once, having recognized me, turned away. It was Morel. He saw that I had recognized him and, checking his tears with an effort, told me that he had stopped for a moment, he was so distressed.

“I have grossly insulted, this very day,” he said, “a person for whom I had the very highest regard. It was a cowardly thing to do, for she loves me.”

“She will forget perhaps, as time goes on,” I replied, without realizing that by speaking thus I made it apparent that I had overheard the scene that afternoon. But he was so absorbed in his own grief that it never even occurred to him that I might know something about the affair.

“She may forget, perhaps,” he said. “But I myself can never forget. I am too conscious of my shame, I am disgusted with myself! However, what I have said I have said, and nothing can unsay it. When people make me lose my temper, I don’t know what I am doing. And it is so bad for me, my nerves are all on edge,” for, like all neurasthenics, he was keenly concerned about his own health. If, during the afternoon, I had witnessed the amorous rage of an infuriated animal, this evening, within a few hours, centuries had elapsed and a new sentiment, a sentiment of shame, regret, grief, showed that an important stage had been passed in the evolution of the beast destined to be transformed into a human being. Nevertheless, I still heard ringing in my ears his “*grand pied-de-grue*” and dreaded an imminent return to the savage state. I had only a very vague notion, however, of what had been happening, and this was only natural, for M. de Charlus himself was totally unaware that for some days past, and especially that day, even before the shameful episode, which was not a direct consequence of the violinist’s condition, Morel had been suffering from a recurrence of his neurasthenia. In fact, he had, in the previous month, proceeded as rapidly as he had been able, a great deal less rapidly than he would have liked, toward the seduction of Jupien’s niece, with whom he was at liberty, now that they were engaged, to go out whenever he chose. But whenever he had gone a

trifle far in his attempts at rape, and especially when he suggested to his betrothed that she might make friends with other girls whom she would then procure for himself, he had met with a resistance that made him furious. All at once (whether she had proved too chaste, or on the contrary had surrendered herself) his desire had subsided. He had decided to break up with her, but feeling that the baron, vicious as he might be, was far more moral than himself, he was afraid that, in the event of a rupture, M. de Charlus might turn him out of the house. And so he had decided, two weeks ago, that he would not see the girl again, would leave M. de Charlus and Jupien to clean up the mess (he employed a more down-to-earth term) by themselves, and, before announcing the rupture, to “beat it” to an unknown destination. A love whose outcome left him a little sad; so that, although his conduct toward Jupien’s niece coincided exactly, in its minutest details, with the plan of conduct that he had outlined to the baron as they were dining together at Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, it is probable that his intention was entirely different, and that sentiments of a less atrocious nature, which he had not foreseen in his theoretical conduct, had embellished it, rendered it sentimental in practice. The sole point in which, on the contrary, the reality was worse than the theory is this, that in the initial plan it had not appeared to him possible that he could remain in Paris after such an act of betrayal. Now, on the contrary, actually to “beat it” for so small a matter seemed to him quite unnecessary. It meant leaving the baron, who would probably be furious, and forfeiting his own position. He would lose all the money that the baron was now giving him. The thought that this was inevitable made his nerves give away altogether. He cried for hours on end, and in order not to think about it anymore dosed himself cautiously with morphine. Then suddenly he hit upon an idea that no doubt had gradually been taking shape in his mind and gaining strength there for some time, and this was that a rupture with the girl would not inevitably mean a complete break with M. de Charlus. To lose all the baron’s money was a serious thing in itself. Morel, in his uncertainty, remained for some days a prey to dark thoughts, such as came to him at the sight of Bloch. Then he decided that Jupien and his niece had been trying to set a trap for him, that they might consider themselves lucky to be rid of him so cheaply. He found in short that the girl had been in the wrong in being so maladroit in not having managed to keep him attached to her by a sensual attraction. Not only did the sacrifice of his position with M. de Charlus seem to him absurd, he even regretted the

expensive dinners he had given the girl since they became engaged, the exact cost of which he knew by heart, being a true son of the valet who used to bring his “book” every month for my uncle’s inspection. For the word “book,” in the singular, which means a printed volume to humanity in general, loses that meaning among royalty and servants. To the latter it means their account book, to the former the register in which we inscribe our names. (At Balbec one day when the Princesse de Luxembourg told me that she had not brought a book with her, I was about to offer her *Pêcheur d’Islande*²⁷² and *Tartarin de Tarascon*,²⁷³ when I realized that she had meant not that she would pass the time less agreeably, but that I would find it more difficult for me to get my name on her list.) Notwithstanding the change in Morel’s point of view with regard to the consequences of his behavior, although that behavior would have seemed to him abominable two months earlier, when he was passionately in love with Jupien’s niece, whereas during the last two weeks he had never ceased to assure himself that the same behavior was natural, praiseworthy, it continued to intensify the state of nervous unrest in which, finally, he had announced the rupture that afternoon. And he was quite prepared to vent his anger, if not (except in a momentary outburst) upon the girl, for whom he still felt that lingering fear, the last trace of love, at any rate upon the baron. He took care, however, not to say anything to him before dinner, for, valuing his own professional virtuosity above everything, whenever he had any difficult music to play (as this evening at the Verdurins’) he avoided (as far as possible, and the scene that afternoon was already more than ample) anything that might impair the flexibility of his wrists. Similarly, a surgeon who is an enthusiastic motorist does not drive when he has an operation to perform. This explained to me why, as he was speaking to me, he kept bending his fingers gently one after another to see whether they had regained their suppleness. A slight frown seemed to indicate that there was still a trace of nervous stiffness. But, so as not to increase it, he relaxed his features, as we forbid ourself to grow irritated at not being able to sleep or to easily prevail upon a woman, for fear that our phobia itself may retard the moment of sleep or of pleasure. And so, anxious to regain his serenity so that he might, as was his habit, absorb himself entirely in what he was going to play at the Verdurins’, and anxious, so long as I was watching him, to let me see how unhappy he was, he decided that the simplest course was to beg me to leave him immediately. His request was superfluous, and it

was a relief to me to get away from him. I had trembled since, as we were due at the same house within a few minutes, he might ask me to take him with me, my memory of the scene that afternoon being too vivid not to give me a certain distaste for the idea of having Morel by my side during the drive. It is quite possible that the love, and afterward the indifference or hatred felt by Morel for Jupien's niece had been sincere. Unfortunately, it was not the first time (nor would it be the last) that he had behaved thus, that he had suddenly "ditched" a girl to whom he had sworn undying love, going so far as to produce a loaded revolver, telling her that he would blow his brains out if ever he was mean enough to desert her. He did nevertheless desert her in time, and felt instead of remorse, a sort of rancor against her. It was not the first time that he had behaved thus, it was not to be the last, with the result that the heads of many girls—girls less forgetful of him than he was of them—suffered—as Jupien's niece suffered long afterward, still in love with Morel although she despised him—suffered, the head ready to burst with a stabbing pain because in each of them—like a fragment of a Greek sculpture—an aspect of Morel's face, hard as marble and beautiful as an antique work of art, was embedded in her brain, with his blossoming hair, his fine eyes, his straight nose, forming a protuberance in a cranium not shaped to receive it, upon which no operation was possible. But in the fullness of time these stony fragments end by slipping into a place where they cause no undue discomfort, from which they never stir again; we are no longer conscious of their presence: I mean forgetfulness, or an indifferent memory.

Meanwhile I had gained two things in the course of the day. On the one hand, thanks to the calm that was produced in me by Albertine's docility, I found it possible, and therefore resolved, to break up with her. On the other hand, there was the fruit of my reflections during the interval that I had spent waiting for her, seated at the piano, the idea that Art, to which I would try to devote my reconquered liberty, was not something that was worth a sacrifice, something above and beyond life, that did not share in its fatuity and futility, the appearance of real individuality obtained in works of art being due merely to the *trompe-l'œil* created by the artist's technical skill. If my afternoon had left behind it other deposits, possibly more profound, they were not to come to my knowledge until much later. As for the two that I was able thus to weigh clearly, they were not to be permanent; for, from this very evening my ideas about art were to rise above the depression to which

they had been subjected in the afternoon, while on the other hand my calm, and consequently the freedom that would enable me to devote myself to it, was once again to be withdrawn from me.

As my carriage, driving along the quai, was approaching the Verdurins' house, I made the driver pull up. I had just seen Brichot alighting from the streetcar at the foot of the rue Bonaparte,²⁷⁴ after which he dusted his shoes with an old newspaper and put on a pair of pearl gray gloves. I went up to him on foot. For some time past, his sight having grown steadily weaker, he had been endowed—as richly as an observatory—with new spectacles of a powerful and complicated kind, which, like astronomical instruments, seemed to be screwed into his eyes. He focused their exaggerated blaze upon myself and recognized me. They—the spectacles—were in marvelous condition. But behind them I could see, minute, pallid, convulsive, expiring, a remote gaze placed under this powerful apparatus, as, in a laboratory equipped out of all proportion to the work that is done in it, you may watch the last throes of some insignificant animalcule through the latest and most perfect type of microscope. I offered the nearly blind man my arm to guide him on his way. “This time it is not by great Cherbourg that we meet,” he said to me, “but by Petit Dunkerque,”²⁷⁵ a remark that I found extremely tiresome, as I failed to understand what he meant; and yet I dared not ask Brichot, dreading not so much his scorn as his explanations. I replied that I was longing to see the drawing room in which Swann used to meet Odette every evening. “What, so you know that old story, do you?” he said. “And yet from those days to Swann’s death is what the poet rightly calls: ‘*Grande spatium mortalis aevi.*’”²⁷⁶

Swann’s death had been a crushing blow to me at the time. Swann’s death! Swann, in this phrase, is something more than a noun with a possessive ending. I mean by it his own particular death, the death allotted by destiny to the service of Swann. For we talk of “death” for convenience, but there are almost as many different deaths as there are people. We are not equipped with a sense that would enable us to see, moving at every speed in every direction, these deaths, the active deaths aimed by destiny at this person or that. Often there are deaths that will not be entirely relieved of their duties until two or even three years later. They come in haste to plant a tumor in the side of a Swann, then depart to attend to their other duties, returning only when, the surgeons having performed their operation, it is

necessary to plant the tumor there again. Then comes the moment when we read in *Le Gaulois*²⁷⁷ that Swann's health has been causing anxiety but that he is now making an excellent recovery. Then, a few minutes before the breath leaves our body, death, like a sister of charity who has come to nurse, rather than to destroy us, enters to preside over our last moments, crowns with a supreme halo the cold and stiffening creature whose heart has ceased to beat. And it is this diversity among deaths, the mystery of their circuits, the color of their fatal badge, that makes so stunning a paragraph in the newspapers such as this:

“We learn with deep regret that M. Charles Swann passed away yesterday at his hôtel in Paris after a long and painful illness. A Parisian whose intellectual gifts were widely appreciated, a discriminating but steadfastly loyal friend, he will be universally missed, in those literary and artistic circles where the soundness and refinement of his taste made him a willing and a welcome guest, as well as at the Jockey Club, of which he was one of the oldest and most respected members. He belonged also to the Cercle de l'Union²⁷⁸ and to the Cercle Agricole.²⁷⁹ He had recently resigned his membership in the Cercle de la rue Royale.²⁸⁰ His personal appearance and eminently distinguished bearing never failed to arouse public interest at all the great events of the musical and artistic seasons, especially at private views, at which he was a regular attendant until, during the last years of his life, he became entirely confined to the house. The funeral will take place, etc.”

From this point of view, if one is not “somebody,” the absence of a well-known title makes the process of decomposition even more rapid. No doubt it is more or less anonymously, without any personal identity, that a man still remains Duc d'Uzès. But the ducal coronet does for some time hold the elements together, as their molds hold together those artistically designed ice creams that Albertine admired, whereas the names of ultrafashionable commoners, as soon as they are dead, dissolve and lose their shape. We have seen Mme de Guermantes speak of Cartier as the most intimate friend of the Duc de La Trémoille, as a man greatly in demand in aristocratic circles. To a later generation, Cartier has become something so formless that it would almost be adding to his importance to make him out as related to the jeweler Cartier,²⁸¹ with whom he would have smiled to think that anybody could be so ignorant as to confuse him! Swann on the contrary was

a remarkable personality, in both the intellectual and the artistic worlds; and even although he had “produced” nothing, still he had a chance of surviving a little longer. And yet, my dear Charles Swann, whom I used to know so little when I was still so young and you were nearing your grave, it is because he whom you must have regarded as a little imbecile has made you the hero of one of his novels that people are beginning to speak of you again and that your name will perhaps live. If, in Tissot’s painting representing the balcony of the Cercle de la rue Royale,²⁸² where you figure with Gallifet,²⁸³ Edmond de Polignac,²⁸⁴ and Saint-Maurice,²⁸⁵ people are always drawing attention to you, it is because they know that there are some traces of you in the character of Swann.

To return to more general realities, it was of this foretold and yet unforeseen death that I had heard him speak himself to the Duchesse de Guermantes, on the evening of her cousin’s soirée. It was the same death whose striking and specific strangeness had recurred to me one evening when, as I ran my eye over the newspaper, my attention was suddenly arrested by the announcement of it, as though traced in mysterious lines inopportunately interpolated there. They had sufficed to make of a living man someone who can never again respond to what you say to him, to reduce him to a mere name, a written name, that has passed suddenly from the real world to the realm of silence. They were the ones who even now made me eager to make myself familiar with the house in which the Verdurins had lived, and where Swann, who at that time was not merely a row of five letters printed in a newspaper, had dined so often with Odette. I must add also (and this is what for a long time made Swann’s death more painful than any other, although these reasons bore no relation to the individual strangeness of *his* death) that I had never gone to see Gilberte, as I promised him at the Princesse de Guermantes’s, that he had never told me what the “other reason” was, to which he alluded that evening, for his selecting me as the recipient of his conversation with the prince, that a thousand questions occurred to me (as bubbles rise from the bottom of a pond) that I longed to ask him about the most disparate subjects: Vermeer, M. de Mouchy,²⁸⁶ Swann himself, a Boucher tapestry,²⁸⁷ Combray, questions that doubtless were not very vital since I had put off asking them from day to day, but which seemed to me of capital importance now that, his lips being sealed, no answer would ever come. The death of others is like a journey

that you might take yourself and during which, a hundred miles from Paris, you remember that you forgot to pack two dozen handkerchiefs, to leave a key for the cook, to say goodbye to your uncle, to ask the name of the town where the ancient fountain is that you want to see. And yet all these forgotten things that assail you and that you mention, purely for the sake of form, to the friend who is traveling with you, receive as their only response a blank stare; the name of the station, shouted out by the railway employee, only takes you farther away from solutions henceforth impossible, so that deciding to no longer think about things irremediably forgotten, you unpack your lunch and exchange newspapers and magazines.

“No,” Brichot went on, “it wasn’t here that Swann met his future wife, or rather it was here only in the very latest period, after the fire that partially destroyed Mme Verdurin’s former home.”²⁸⁸

Unfortunately, in my fear of displaying in front of Brichot a luxury that seemed to me out of place, since the professor had no share in its enjoyment, I had alighted too hastily from the carriage and the driver had not understood the words I had flung at him over my shoulder in order that I might be well clear of the carriage before Brichot caught sight of me. The consequence was that the driver followed us and asked me whether he was to call for me later; I answered hurriedly in the affirmative and was regarded with a vastly increased respect by the professor, who had come by omnibus.

“Ah! So you were in a carriage,” he said in a solemn tone.

“Only by the purest accident. I never take one as a rule. I always travel by omnibus or on foot. However, it may perhaps entitle me to the great honor of taking you home tonight if you will oblige me by consenting to enter that rattletrap; we will be packed rather tight. But you are always so considerate to me.”

Alas, in making him this offer, I am depriving myself of nothing, I reflected, since in any case I will still be obliged to go home because of Albertine. Her presence in my house, at an hour when nobody could possibly call to see her, allowed me to dispose as freely of my time as I had that afternoon, when I knew that she was on her way back from the Trocadéro and that I was in no hurry to see her again. But furthermore, as also in the afternoon, I felt that I had a woman in the house and that on returning home I would not taste the fortifying exaltation of solitude.

“I heartily accept,” replied Brichot. “At the period to which you allude, our friends occupied in the rue Montalivet²⁸⁹ a magnificent ground-floor apartment with an entresol, and a garden behind, less sumptuous of course, and yet to my mind preferable to the old Venetian Embassy.” Brichot informed me that this evening there was to be at “quai Conti” (thus it was that the faithful spoke of the Verdurin salon since it had been transferred to that address) a great musical “razzle-dazzle” organized by M. de Charlus. He went on to say that in the old days to which I had referred, the little nucleus had been different, and its tone not at all the same, not only because the faithful had then been younger. He told me of elaborate jokes played by Elstir (what he called “pure buffooneries”), as for example one day when the painter, having pretended to fail at the last moment, had come disguised as an extra waiter and, as he handed round the dishes, whispered bawdy remarks in the ear of the extremely prudish Baroness Putbus, crimson with anger and alarm; then disappearing before the end of dinner he had had a sitz bath carried into the drawing room, out of which, when the party left the table, he had emerged stark naked uttering fearful oaths; and also of supper parties to which the guests came in paper costumes, designed, cut out, and painted by Elstir, which were masterpieces in themselves, Brichot having worn on one occasion that of a great nobleman of the court of Charles VII, with long turned-up points to his shoes, and another time that of Napoléon I, for which Elstir had fashioned a Grand Cordon of the Légion d’honneur out of sealing wax. In short Brichot, seeing again with the eyes of memory the drawing room of those days with its high windows, its low sofas devoured by the midday sun, which had had to be replaced, declared that he preferred it to the drawing room of today. Of course, I quite understood that by “drawing room” Brichot meant—as the word “church” implies not merely the religious edifice but the congregation of worshipers—not merely the apartment, but the people who frequented it, the special pleasures that they came to enjoy there, which were shaped, in his memory, by those sofas upon which, when you called to see Mme Verdurin in the afternoon, you waited until she was ready, while the pink blossoms on the chestnut trees outside, and on the mantelpiece carnations in vases seemed, with a charming and kindly thought for the visitor expressed in the smiling welcome of their pink hues, to be watching anxiously for the tardy appearance of the lady of the house. But if this “salon” seemed to him superior to the present one, it was perhaps because our mind is the old

Proteus²⁹⁰ who cannot remain the slave of any one shape and, even in the social world, suddenly abandons a salon that has slowly and with difficulty risen to the pitch of perfection to prefer another that is less brilliant, just as the “touched-up” photographs that Odette had had taken at Otto’s,²⁹¹ in which she queened it in a “princess” gown, her hair waved by Lenthéric,²⁹² did not appeal to Swann so much as a little “cabinet picture” taken at Nice, in which, in a cloth cape, her loosely dressed hair protruding beneath a straw hat trimmed with pansies and a bow of black ribbon, instead of being twenty years younger (for women as a rule look all the older in a photograph, the earlier it is), she looked like a little servant girl twenty years older than she now was. Perhaps too Brichot derived some pleasure from praising to me what I myself had never known, from showing me that he had tasted delights that I could never enjoy. If so, he was successful, for merely by mentioning the names of two or three people who were no longer alive and to each of whom he imparted something mysterious by the way he spoke of them, to that delicious intimacy, he made me ask myself what it could have been like; I felt that everything that had been told me about the Verdurins was far too coarse; and indeed, in the case of Swann, whom I had known, I reproached myself with not having paid him sufficient attention, with not having paid attention to him in a sufficiently disinterested spirit, with not having listened to him properly when he used to entertain me while we waited for his wife to come home for lunch and he showed me his treasures, now that I knew that he was to be classed with the most brilliant talkers of the past.

Just as we were coming to Mme Verdurin’s doorstep, I caught sight of M. de Charlus, steering toward us the bulk of his huge body, drawing unwillingly in his wake one of those apaches²⁹³ or mendicants who nowadays, whenever he appeared, sprang up without fail even in what were to all appearance the most deserted corners, by whom this powerful monster was, evidently against his will, invariably escorted, although at a certain distance, as is the shark by its pilot, in short, contrasting so markedly with the haughty stranger of my first visit to Balbec, with his stern aspect, his affectation of virility, that I seemed to be discovering, accompanied by its satellite, a planet at a wholly different period of its revolution, when one begins to see it full, or a sick man now devoured by the malady that a few years ago was but a tiny spot that was easily concealed and the gravity of

which was never suspected. Although the operation that Brichot had undergone had restored a tiny portion of the sight that he had thought to be lost forever, I do not think he had observed the apache following in the baron's steps. Not that this mattered, for, ever since La Raspelière, and notwithstanding the professor's friendly regard for M. de Charlus, the sight of the latter always made him feel ill at ease. No doubt to every man the life of every other extends along shadowy paths that he does not suspect. Lying, though so often deceptive, and upon which all conversation is based, conceals less perfectly a feeling of hostility, or of self-interest, or a visit that we wish to appear not to have paid, or a brief escapade with a mistress, which we are anxious to keep from our wife, than a good reputation covers up—so as not to let its existence be guessed—sexual depravity. It may remain unsuspected for a lifetime; an accidental encounter on a pier, at night, discloses it; even then this accidental discovery is frequently misunderstood and a third person, who is in the know, must supply the elusive clue of which everyone is unaware. But, once we know the secret, it alarms us because we feel that that way madness lies, far more than by its immorality. Mme de Surgis le Duc did not possess the slightest trace of any moral feeling and would have admitted anything about her sons that could be degraded and explained by material interest, which is comprehensible to all mankind. But she forbade them to go on visiting M. de Charlus when she learned that, by a sort of internal clockwork, he was inevitably drawn upon each of their visits, to pinch their chins and to make each of them pinch his brother's. She felt that uneasy sense of a physical mystery that makes us wonder whether the neighbor with whom we have been on friendly terms is not tainted with cannibalism, and to the baron's repeated inquiry: "When am I going to see the young men?" she would reply, conscious of the thunderbolts that she was attracting to her defenseless head, that they were very busy working for examinations, preparing to go abroad, etc. Irresponsibility aggravates faults, and even crimes, whatever anyone may say. Landru,²⁹⁴ assuming that he really did kill the women, may be pardoned if he did so from financial motives, which it is possible to resist, but not if his crime was due to an irresistible sadism.

Brichot's coarse pleasantries, in the early days of his friendship with the baron, had given place, as soon as it was a question, not of uttering commonplaces but of understanding, to an awkward feeling concealed by a certain merriment. He reassured himself by recalling pages of Plato,²⁹⁵ lines

of Virgil,²⁹⁶ because, being mentally as well as physically blind, he did not understand that in those days to love a young man was like, in our day (Socrates'²⁹⁷ jokes reveal this more clearly than Plato's theories), keeping a dancing girl before one marries and settles down. M. de Charlus himself would not have understood, he who confused his mania with friendship, which does not resemble it in the least, and the athletes of Praxiteles²⁹⁸ with obliging boxers. He refused to see that for the last nineteen hundred years ("a pious courtier under a pious prince would have been an atheist under an atheist prince," as La Bruyère reminds us)²⁹⁹ all conventional homosexuality—that of Plato's young friends as well as that of Virgil's shepherds—has disappeared, that what survives and increases is only the involuntary, the neurotic kind, which we conceal from other people and disguise to ourselves. And M. de Charlus would have been wrong in not frankly disowning the pagan genealogy. In exchange for a little physical beauty, how vast the moral superiority! The shepherd in Theocritus³⁰⁰ who sighs for love of a boy later on will have no reason to be less hard of heart, less dull of wit than the other shepherd whose flute sounds for Amaryllis.³⁰¹ For the former is not suffering from a malady, he is conforming to the customs of his time. It is the homosexuality that survives in spite of obstacles, a thing of scorn and loathing, that is the only true form, the only form that can be found conjoined in a person with an enhancement of his moral qualities. We are appalled at the apparently close relation between these and our bodily attributes, when we think of the slight dislocation of a purely physical taste, the slight blemish in one of the senses, that explain why the world of poets and musicians, so firmly closed to the Duc de Guermantes, opens its portals to M. de Charlus. That the latter should show taste in the furnishing of his home, which is that of a housewife with eclectic taste, need not surprise us; but the narrow loophole that opens upon Beethoven³⁰² and Veronese!³⁰³ But this does not exempt the sane from a feeling of alarm when a madman who has composed a sublime poem, after explaining to them in the most logical fashion that he has been shut up by mistake, through his wife's machinations, imploring them to intercede for him with the director of the asylum, complaining of the promiscuous company that is forced upon him, concludes as follows: "You see that man who is waiting to speak to me on the lawn, whom I am obliged to put up with; he thinks that he is Jesus Christ. That alone will show you the sort of

lunatics that I have to live among; he cannot be Christ, for I am Christ myself!" A moment earlier, you were on the point of going to assure the psychiatrist that a mistake had been made. On hearing these last words, even if you bear in mind the admirable poem at which this same man is working every day, you shrink from him, as Mme de Surgis's sons shrank from M. de Charlus, not that he would have done them any harm, but because of his ceaseless invitations, the ultimate purpose of which was to pinch their chins. The poet is to be pitied, who must, with no Virgil to guide him, pass through the circles of an inferno of sulfur and brimstone, to cast himself into the fire that falls from heaven in order to rescue a few of the inhabitants of Sodom.³⁰⁴ No charm in his work; the same severity in his life as in those of the unfrocked priests who follow the strictest rule of celibacy so that no one may be able to ascribe to anything but loss of faith their discarding of the cassock. Even then it is not always the same for these writers. Is there a psychiatrist who by dint of frequenting the insane has not had his own case of madness? He is fortunate if he is able to affirm that his madness is not an earlier and latent one that inspired him to treat them. A psychiatrist's studies often have such an effect on him. But before that, what obscure inclination, what dreadful fascination had made him choose them?

Pretending not to see the shady individual who was following in his wake (whenever the baron ventured onto the boulevards or crossed the waiting room in the Gare Saint-Lazare, these followers might be counted by the dozen who, in the hope of "hitting him up for some dough," never let him out of their sight), and afraid at the same time that the man might have the audacity to accost him, the baron had devoutly lowered his darkened eyelids which, in contrast to his rice-powdered cheeks, gave him the appearance of a Grand Inquisitor painted by El Greco.³⁰⁵ But this priestly expression caused alarm, and he looked like an unfrocked priest, various compromises to which he had been driven by the need to gratify his taste and to keep it secret having had the effect of bringing to the surface of his face precisely what the baron sought to conceal, a debauched life indicated by moral decay. This last, indeed, whatever be its cause, is easily detected, for it is never slow to materialize and proliferate upon a face, especially on the cheeks and around the eyes, as physically as the ochreous yellows of jaundice or repulsive reds of a skin disease. Nor was it merely in the cheeks, or rather the jowls of this painted face, in the mammiferous chest, the fleshy rump of this body abandoned to self-indulgence and invaded by

obesity, that there now lingered, spreading like a film of oil, the vice at one time so jealously confined by M. de Charlus in the most secret chamber of his heart. Now it overflowed into all his remarks.

“So this is how you prowl the streets at night, Brichot, with a handsome young man,” he said as he joined us, while the disappointed ruffian made off. “A fine example! We must tell your young students at the Sorbonne that this is how you behave. But I must say, the society of youth seems to be good for you, Monsieur le Professeur, you are as fresh as a rosebud. And you, my dear boy, how are you?” he asked me, abandoning his bantering tone. “We don’t see you often at quai Conti, handsome youth. And your cousin, how is she? She didn’t come with you? I wish she were here, she is charming. Will we see your cousin this evening? Oh, she is very pretty! And she would be even prettier if she cultivated even more the rare art, which she seems to possess naturally, of dressing well.”

Here I must say that M. de Charlus “possessed,” which made him the exact opposite of me, the gift of closely observing the details in a woman’s attire or in a painting.³⁰⁶ As for dresses and hats, certain malicious gossips or theoreticians who are too categorical will say that in a man the penchant for masculine beauty is compensated by the innate taste, the study, the science of female attire. And in fact it sometimes happens, as though men having captured all the physical desire, all the deep affection of a Charlus, the other sex finds itself gratified in return by all that involves “platonic” taste (an adjective that is highly inappropriate), or, simply everything that involves taste, with the most learned and infallible refinements. In that respect, M. de Charlus would have merited the nickname that was later given him, “the Dressmaker.”³⁰⁷ But his taste, his ability to observe extended to many other things. We have seen, on the evening when I called on him after the dinner party at the Duchesse de Guermantes’s, that I had not noticed the masterpieces that he had in his dwelling until he showed them to me, one after the other. He recognized immediately things to which no one else would have paid the slightest attention, and he did so in works of art as well as in the dishes at a dinner party (and from paintings to cuisine and included everything in between). I have always regretted that M. de Charlus, instead of limiting his artistic gifts to painting a fan as a present to his sister-in-law (we have seen the Duchesse de Guermantes holding it in her hand and spreading it out, not so much to fan herself as to show it off by displaying ostentatiously Palamède’s affection for her), and

to perfecting his piano playing in order to accompany, without making mistakes, Morel's violin bowings, I have, as I said, always regretted and still regret that M. de Charlus never wrote anything. It is true that I cannot conclude from the eloquence of his conversation and even of his correspondence that he would have been a talented writer. These achievements are not on the same level. We have seen bores who mouth banalities write masterpieces and kings of causerie prove themselves worse than mediocre as soon as they attempt to write. All the same, I believe that if M. de Charlus had tried his hand at prose, starting with those artistic subjects that he knew so well, the sparks would have caught, lightning would have struck, and the man of fashion would have become a master of the pen. I often told him this, but he refused to try, perhaps simply due to laziness or time monopolized by the brilliant fêtes or sordid diversions, or to the Guermantes' need to prolong idle chatter indefinitely. I regret it all the more because in his most dazzling conversation, his wit was never separated from his character, the pearls of one from the insolence of the other. If he had written books, then instead of detesting him while admiring him as one did in a salon where in his moments of most exceptional intelligence, he at the same time trampled on the weak, savaging himself on someone who had not insulted him, seeking ignobly to turn one friend against another—if he had written books, one would have had his intellectual qualities isolated, decanted from his baseness, nothing would have interfered with our admiration of him, and many of his traits would have made friendship blossom.

In any case, even if I am wrong about what he might have created on the simplest page, he would have performed an important service by writing, for if he made fine distinctions in all that he singled out, he also knew the name of every detail. It is true that, while chatting with him, if I did not learn to observe (my preoccupations and sentiments lay elsewhere), at least I saw things that without him I never would have noticed, but their name, which would have helped me to recapture their forms, their color, those names I always quickly forgot. If he had written books, even bad ones, which I don't believe they would have been, what a delightful dictionary, what an inexhaustible repertory would we have! After all, who knows? Instead of placing in a work his knowledge and his taste, perhaps, due to that demon that often thwarts our destiny, he might have written colorless serial novels, or pointless tales of travel and adventure.

“Yes, she does know how to clothe herself or more precisely how to dress,” said M. de Charlus, returning to the subject of Albertine. “My only doubt is whether she dresses in conformity with her own particular beauty, and I am perhaps somewhat responsible for that, due to advice not sufficiently thought through. What I often used to tell her as we were on our way to La Raspelière were words perhaps dictated—and I regret this—more by the character of the countryside, by the proximity of the beaches, than by the individual character of your cousin’s type—words that made her select fabrics that are too light. I acknowledge that I’ve seen her wearing very pretty muslins, charming pink gauze scarves, a certain pink toque perfectly adorned by a little pink feather. But I believe that her beauty, which is real and solid, requires more than little frills. Is a toque right for that enormous head of hair that only a kokoshnik tiara³⁰⁸ would set off to full advantage? Very few women can wear those antique dresses that look like theatrical costumes. But the beauty of this girl, who in fact is already a woman, is exceptional and deserves a dress of old Genoese velvet” (I immediately thought of Elstir and the Fortuny dressing gowns) “that I would not hesitate to weigh down further with incrustations or pendants or other marvelous old-fashioned stones (that’s the finest praise that one can give them), like peridot, marcasite, and the incomparable labradorite. Moreover, she herself seems instinctively to recognize the counterweight required by a rather heavy beauty. You remember, when we went to dine at La Raspelière, all the accessories she carried with her, pretty boxes, heavy bags and into which, when she marries, she will be able to put more than face powder or crimson lipstick, but—in a not-too-indigo lapis lazuli jewel case—pearls and rubies, not cultured ones, I think, for she will no doubt marry someone who is wealthy.”

“Ah, well, Baron!” Brichot interrupted, fearing that these last words might have upset me because he had some doubts about the purity of my relationship and the authenticity of my cousinship with Albertine, “How you do go on about young ladies!”

“Can’t you hold your tongue in front of this child, you old gossip monger,” M. de Charlus sniggered, while lowering his hand, in a gesture intended to silence Brichot, which he did not fail to let fall on my shoulder.

“I have interrupted you, you looked as though you were enjoying yourselves like a pair of giddy girls and had no need of an old Granny Killjoy like myself. I won’t take it to the confessional, since you were

almost at your destination.” The baron’s mood was all the more blithe since he knew nothing whatever about the scene that afternoon, Jupien having decided that it was better to protect his niece against a repetition of the onslaught than to inform M. de Charlus. And so the baron was still looking forward to the marriage and delighting in the thought of it. One would suppose that it is a consolation to these great solitaires to give their tragic celibacy the consolation of a fictitious fatherhood. “But, upon my word, Brichot,” he went on, turning with a laugh to gaze at us, “I have some misgivings when I see you in such gallant company. You were like a pair of lovers. Going along arm in arm, I say, Brichot, you are taking some liberties!” Ought one to attribute such remarks to the aging of a mind, less master of its reflexes than in the past, which in moments of automatism lets out a secret that has been so carefully hidden for forty years? Or rather to that contempt for plebeian opinion that all the Guermantes felt in their hearts, and of which M. de Charlus’s brother, the duke, displayed another form when, heedless of the fact that my mother could see him, he used to shave standing by his bedroom window in his unbuttoned nightshirt? Had M. de Charlus contracted, during the scorching journeys between Doncières and Douville, the dangerous habit of making himself at ease, and, just as he would push back his straw hat in order to cool his huge forehead, of unfastening—at first, for a few moments only—the mask that for too long had been rigorously imposed upon his true face? His conjugal attitude toward Morel might well have astonished anyone who knew that he no longer loved him. But M. de Charlus had reached the stage when the monotony of the pleasures that his vice has to offer became wearying. He had sought instinctively for new escapades, and, growing tired of the strangers whom he picked up, had passed to the opposite pole, to what he used to imagine that he would always loathe, the imitation of a “household,” or of “fatherhood.” Sometimes even this did not suffice him, he required novelty, and would go and spend the night with a woman, just as a normal man may, once in his life, have wished to go to bed with a boy, from a curiosity similar though inverse, and in either case equally unhealthy. The baron’s existence as one of the “faithful,” living, for Charlie’s sake,³⁰⁹ entirely among the little clan, had had, by undoing the efforts that he had been making for years to keep up lying appearances, the same influence that a voyage of exploration or residence in the colonies has upon certain Europeans who discard the ruling principles by which they

were guided at home. And yet, the internal revolution of a mind, ignorant at first of the anomaly that it carried within it, then appalled at it after the discovery, and finally growing so used to it as to fail to perceive that it is not safe to confess to other people what one has come in time to confess without shame to oneself, had been even more effective in liberating M. de Charlus from the last vestiges of social constraint than the time that he spent at the Verdurins'. No banishment, indeed, to the South Pole, or to the summit of Mont Blanc,³¹⁰ can separate us so entirely from our fellow creatures as a prolonged sojourn in the seclusion of a secret vice, that is to say of a state of mind that is different from theirs. A vice (so M. de Charlus used at one time to style it) to which the baron now gave the debonair aspect of a mere failing, extremely common, attractive on the whole and almost amusing, like laziness, absentmindedness or gourmandise. Conscious of the curiosity that his own striking personality aroused, M. de Charlus derived a certain pleasure from satisfying, whetting, sustaining it. Just as a Jewish journalist will come forward day after day as the champion of Catholicism, not, probably, with any hope of being taken seriously, but simply in order not to disappoint the good-natured amusement of his readers, M. de Charlus would jokingly denounce dissolute habits in the company of the little clan as he would have mimicked a person speaking English or imitated Mounet-Sully,³¹¹ without waiting to be asked, so as to pay his share with a good grace, by displaying an amateur talent in society; so that M. de Charlus now threatened Brichot that he would report to the Sorbonne that he was in the habit of walking about with young men, exactly as the circumcised scribe keeps referring in and out of season to the "Eldest Daughter of the Church"³¹² and the "Sacred Heart of Jesus,"³¹³ that is to say without the least trace of hypocrisy, but with a distinctly histrionic effect. It was not only the change in the words themselves, so different from those that he allowed himself to use in the past, that seemed to require some explanation, there was also the change that had occurred in his intonations, his gestures, all of which now singularly resembled the type M. de Charlus used most fiercely to castigate; he would now utter unconsciously almost the same little cries (unconscious in him, and all the more deep-rooted) as are uttered consciously by the invert who refers to one another as "my dear"; as though this deliberate "camping," against which M. de Charlus had for so long set his face, was after all merely a brilliant and faithful

imitation of the manner that men of the Charlus type, whatever they may say, are compelled to adopt when they have reached a certain stage in their malady, just as sufferers from general paralysis or locomotor ataxia inevitably end by displaying certain symptoms. As a matter of fact—and this is what this purely unconscious camping revealed—the difference between the stern Charlus, dressed all in black, with his stiffly brushed hair, whom I had known, and the painted young men, loaded with jewelry, was no more than the purely imaginary difference that exists between an agitated person who talks fast, keeps fidgeting all the time, and a neurotic who talks slowly, preserves a perpetual phlegm, but is tainted with the same neurasthenia in the eyes of the physician who knows that each of the two is devoured by the same anxieties and marred by the same defects. At the same time one could tell that M. de Charlus had aged from wholly different signs, such as the extraordinary frequency in his conversation of certain expressions that had taken root in it and used now to crop up at every moment (for example: “the chain of circumstances”) upon which the baron’s speech leaned in sentence after sentence as upon a necessary prop.

“Is Charlie already here?” Brichot asked M. de Charlus as we were about to ring the doorbell.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the baron, raising his arms in the air and half-shutting his eyes with the air of a person who does not wish anyone to accuse him of being indiscreet, all the more so as he had probably been reproached by Morel for things that he had said and that the other, as timorous as he was vain, and as ready to disown M. de Charlus as he was to boast of his friendship, had considered serious although they were quite unimportant. “You know, he never tells me what he is going to do. I don’t know with whom he is cheating on me. I hardly ever see him.”

If the conversations of two people bound by a tie of intimacy are full of lies, this occurs no less spontaneously in the conversations that a third person holds with a lover on the subject of the person with whom the latter is in love, whatever the sex of that person.

“Have you seen him lately?” I asked M. de Charlus, with the object of seeming at once not to be afraid of mentioning Morel to him and not to believe that they were actually living together.

“He came in, as it happened, for five minutes this morning while I was still half asleep, and sat down on the side of my bed, as though he wanted to ravish me.”

I guessed at once that M. de Charlus had seen Charlie within the last hour, for if we ask a woman when she last saw the man whom we know to be—and whom she may perhaps suppose that we suspect of being—her lover, if she has just taken tea with him, she replies: “I saw him for an instant before lunch.” Between these two incidents the only difference is that one is false and the other true, but both are equally innocent, or, if you prefer it, equally culpable. And so we would be unable to understand why the mistress (in this case, M. de Charlus) always chooses the false version, if we did not know that such replies are determined, unknown to the person who utters them, by a number of factors that appear so out of proportion to the triviality of the incident that we do not take the trouble to consider them. But to a physicist the space occupied by the tiniest ball of pith is explained by the harmony of action, the conflict or equilibrium, of laws of attraction or repulsion that govern far greater worlds. Here we need merely record, without pausing to consider them, the desire to appear natural and fearless, the instinctive impulse to conceal a secret assignation, a blend of modesty and ostentation, the need to confess what one finds so delightful and to show that one is loved, a divination of what the interlocutor knows or guesses—but does not say—a divination that, exceeding or falling short of the other person’s, makes one now exaggerate, now underestimate it, the spontaneous longing to play with fire and the determination to rescue something from the blaze. Just as many different laws acting in opposite directions dictate the more general responses with regard to the innocence, the “Platonism,” or on the contrary the carnal reality of the relations that one has with the person whom one says one saw in the morning when one has seen him or her in the evening. At the same time, speaking generally, let us say that M. de Charlus, notwithstanding the aggravation of his malady, which perpetually urged him to reveal, to insinuate, sometimes simply to invent compromising details, did intend, during this period in his life, to make it known that Charlie was not a man of the same sort as himself and that they were friends and nothing more. This did not prevent him (even though it may quite possibly have been true) from contradicting himself at times (as with regard to the hour at which they had last met), whether he forgot himself at such moments and told the truth, or invented a lie, boastingly or from a sentimental affectation or because he thought it amusing to mislead his interlocutor.

“You know that he is to me,” the baron went on, “a good little friend, for whom I have the greatest affection, as I am certain” (was he uncertain of it, then, that he felt the need to say that he was certain?) “he has for me, but there is nothing else between us, nothing of that sort, you understand, nothing of that sort,” said the baron, as naturally as though he had been speaking of a woman. “Yes, he came in this morning to pull me out of bed. Though he knows that I hate anybody to see me in bed. You don’t mind? Oh, it’s horrible, it’s so disturbing, one looks so perfectly hideous, of course I’m no longer five-and-twenty, they won’t choose me to be Queen of the May, still one does like to feel that one is looking one’s best.”

It is possible that the baron was sincere when he spoke of Morel as a good little friend, and that he was being even more truthful than he supposed when he said: “I never know what he’s doing; he tells me nothing about his life.” Indeed, we may mention (to anticipate by a few weeks our narrative that we will resume, immediately after this parenthesis, at the moment when M. de Charlus, Brichot, and myself are arriving at Mme Verdurin’s front door), we may mention that shortly before this evening the baron had been plunged in grief and stupefaction by a letter that he had opened by mistake and that was addressed to Morel. This letter, which by a repercussion was to cause me intense misery, was written by the actress Léa, notorious for her exclusive taste for women. And yet her letter to Morel (whom M. de Charlus had never even suspected of knowing her) was written in the most impassioned tone. Its indelicacy prevents us from reproducing it here, but we may mention that Léa addressed him throughout in the feminine gender, with such expressions as: “Go on, you dirty girl!” or “Of course, so are you, my pretty, you know you are one of us.” And in this letter reference was made to various other women who seemed to be no less Morel’s friends than Léa’s. On the other hand, Morel’s sarcasm at the baron’s expense and Léa’s at that of an officer who was keeping her, and of whom she said: “He keeps writing me letters begging me to be good! You must be kidding! What do you say to that, my little white puss,” revealed to M. de Charlus a state of things no less unsuspected by him than were Morel’s peculiar and intimate relations with Léa. What most disturbed the baron were the words “one of us.” Ignorant at first of its application, he had eventually, at a time already remote in the past, learned that he himself was “one of them.” And now the notion that he had acquired of this expression was again brought into question. When he had discovered that he was “one

of them,” he had supposed this to mean that his tastes, as Saint-Simon says, did not lie in the direction of women.³¹⁴ And here was this expression “one of us” applied to Morel and acquiring an extension of meaning of which M. de Charlus was unaware, so much so that Morel gave proof, according to this letter, of his being “one of them” by having the same taste as certain women for other women. From that moment the baron’s jealousy had no longer any reason to confine itself to the men of Morel’s acquaintance but began to extend to the women also. So that the people who were “one of them” were not merely those that he had supposed to be “one of them,” but a whole vast section of the inhabitants of the planet, consisting of women as well as of men, of men loving not merely men but women also, and the baron, in the face of this novel meaning of a phrase that was so familiar to him, felt himself tormented by an anxiety of the mind as well as of the heart, born of this twofold mystery that combined an extension of the field of his jealousy with the sudden inadequacy of a definition.

M. de Charlus had never in his life been anything but an amateur. That is to say, incidents of this sort could never be of any use to him. He worked off the painful impression that they might make upon him in violent scenes in which he was a past-master of eloquence, or in crafty intrigues. But to a person endowed with the qualities of a Bergotte, for example, they might have been of inestimable value. This may indeed explain, to a certain extent (since we have to grope blindfolded, but choose, like the lower animals, the herb that is good for us), why men like Bergotte have generally lived in the company of women who were ordinary, false, and malicious. Their beauty is sufficient for the writer’s imagination, enhances his generosity, but does not in any way alter the nature of his mistress, whose life, situated thousands of feet below the level of his own, whose improbable relationships, whose lies carried farther, and, what is more, in another direction than what might have been expected, appear in occasional flashes. The lie, the perfect lie, about people whom we know, about the relations that we have had with them, about our motive for some action, a motive that we express in totally different terms, the lie as to what we are, whom we love, what we feel with regard to the person who loves us and believes that she has fashioned us in her own image because she keeps on kissing us morning, noon, and night, that lie is one of the only things in the world that can open a window for us upon what is new, unknown, that can awaken in us sleeping senses for the contemplation of universes that otherwise we

would never have known. We are bound to say, insofar as M. de Charlus is concerned, that, if he was stupefied to learn with regard to Morel a certain number of things that the latter had carefully concealed from him, he was not justified in concluding from this that it was a mistake to associate too closely with the lower orders. (One of the revelations that he had found most painful had been that of a tour Morel had made with Léa, whereas at the time he had assured M. de Charlus that he was studying music in Germany. He had found support for this falsehood in obliging friends in Germany to whom he had sent his letters, to be forwarded from there to M. de Charlus,³¹⁵ who, as it happened, was so positive that Morel was there that he had not even looked at the postmark.) We will indeed see, in the concluding section of this work, M. de Charlus himself engaged in doing things that would have astonished the members of his family and his friends far more than he could possibly have been astonished by the revelations of Léa.³¹⁶

But it is time to rejoin the baron as he advances with Brichot and myself toward the Verdurins' door. "And what," he went on, turning to me, "has become of your young Hebrew friend whom we met at Douville? It occurred to me that, if you liked, one might perhaps invite him to the house one evening." For M. de Charlus, who did not shrink from employing a private detective to spy upon every word and action of Morel, for all the world like a husband or a lover, had not ceased to pay attention to other young men. The surveillance that he made one of his old servants maintain, through an agency, upon Morel, was so indiscreet that his footmen thought they were being trailed, and one of the housemaids could not endure the suspense, never ventured into the street, always expecting to find a policeman at her heels. "She can do whatever she likes! It would be a waste of time and money to follow her! As if her goings on mattered to us!" the old servant ironically exclaimed, for he was so passionately devoted to his master that, albeit he in no way shared the baron's tastes, he had come in time, with such ardor did he employ himself in their service, to speak of them as though they were his own. "He is the very best of good fellows," M. de Charlus would say of this old servant, for we never appreciate anyone so much as those who combine with other great virtues that of placing themselves unconditionally at the service of our vices. It was moreover of men alone that M. de Charlus was capable of feeling any jealousy so far as Morel was concerned. Women inspired in him no jealousy whatsoever. This

is indeed an almost universal rule with the Charlus type. The love of the man they love for a woman is something different, which occurs in another animal species (a lion leaves tigers alone); does not distress them; and if anything, reassures them. Sometimes, it is true, in the case of those who exalt their inversion to the level of a priesthood, such love creates disgust. These men resent their friends' having succumbed to it, not as a betrayal but as a lapse from virtue. A Charlus, of a different variety from the baron, would have been as indignant at the discovery of Morel's relations with a woman as upon reading on a poster that he, the interpreter of Bach and Handel,³¹⁷ was going to play Puccini.³¹⁸ It is, by the way, for this reason that the young men who, with an eye to their own personal advantage, condescend to the love of men like Charlus, assure them that loose women³¹⁹ inspire them only with disgust, just as they would tell a doctor that they never touch alcohol and care only for spring water. But M. de Charlus, in this respect, departed to some extent from the general rule. Since he admired everything about Morel, the latter's successes with women caused him no annoyance, gave him the same joy as his successes on the concert platform, or at *écarté*.³²⁰ "But do you know, my dear fellow, he has women," he would say, with an air of disclosure, of scandal, possibly of envy, above all of admiration. "He is extraordinary," he would continue. "Everywhere, the most notorious whores have eyes only for him. They stare at him everywhere, whether it's on the métro or in the theater. It's becoming a nuisance! I can't go out with him to a restaurant without the waiter bringing him notes from at least three women. And always pretty women too. Not that there's anything surprising in that. I was watching him yesterday, I can quite understand it, he has become so beautiful, he looks just like a Bronzino;³²¹ he is really marvelous." But M. de Charlus liked to show that he loved Morel, and liked to persuade other people, possibly to persuade himself, that Morel loved him. He took a sort of pride in having Morel always with him, in spite of the harm that the young fellow might do to the baron's social position. For (and this is frequent among men of good position, who are snobs, and, in their vanity, sever all their social ties in order to be seen everywhere with a mistress, a demimondaine, or a lady of tarnished reputation, whom nobody will invite, and with whom nevertheless it seems to them flattering to be associated) he had arrived at that stage at which self-esteem devotes all its energy to destroying the goals that it has

attained, whether because, under the influence of love, a man finds a prestige that he alone perceives in ostentatious relations with the beloved, or because, by the waning of social ambitions that have been gratified, and the rising of a tide of ancillary curiosities all the more absorbing the more platonic they are, the latter have not only reached but have passed the level at which the former found it difficult to remain.

As for other young men, M. de Charlus found that to his fondness for them Morel's existence was not an obstacle, and that indeed his brilliant reputation as a violinist or his growing fame as a composer and journalist might in certain instances be a lure. If anyone introduced to the baron a young composer with a pleasing allure, it was in Morel's talents that he sought an opportunity of doing the newcomer a favor. "You must," he would tell him, "bring me some of your work so that Morel can play it at a concert or on tour. There is hardly any decent music written, now, for the violin! It is a godsend to find anything new. And abroad they appreciate that sort of thing enormously. Even in the provinces there are little musical societies where they love music with a fervor and intelligence that are quite admirable." Without any greater sincerity (for all this could serve only as a bait and it was seldom that Morel condescended to fulfill these promises), Bloch having confessed that he was something of a poet (when he was "in the mood," he had added with the sarcastic laugh with which he would accompany a platitude, when he could think of nothing original), M. de Charlus said to me: "You must tell your young Hebrew, since he writes verses, that he must really bring me some for Morel. For a composer, that is always the stumbling block, to find something decent to set to music. One might even consider a libretto. It would not be without interest and would acquire a certain value from the distinction of the poet, from my patronage, from a whole chain of auxiliary circumstances, among which Morel's talent would take the chief place. For he is composing a lot just now, and writing too, and very nicely, I must talk to you about it. As for his talent as a performer (there, as you know, he is already a master), you will see this evening how well the lad plays Vinteuil's music. He overwhelms me; at his age, to have such an understanding while he is still such a boy, such a kid! Oh, this evening is only to be a little rehearsal. The big affair is to come off in two or three days. But it will be much more distinguished this evening. And so we are delighted that you have come," he went on, employing the plural pronoun doubtless because a king says: "It is our wish." "The

program is so magnificent that I have advised Mme Verdurin to give two parties. One in a few days' time, at which she will have all her own acquaintances, the other tonight at which the hostess is, to use a legal expression, "disseized."³²² It is I who have issued the invitations, and I have collected a few people from another sphere, who may be useful to Charlie, and whom it will be nice for the Verdurins to meet. Don't you agree, it is all very well to have the finest music played by the greatest artists, the effect of the performance remains muffled as though in cotton wool, if the audience is composed of the milliner from across the way and the grocer from around the corner. You know what I think of the intellectual level of people in society, still they can play certain quite important parts, among others that which in public events devolves upon the press, and which is that of being an organ of publicity. You know what I mean; I have for example invited my sister-in-law Oriane; it is not certain that she will come, but it is on the other hand certain that, if she does come, she will understand absolutely nothing. But one doesn't ask her to understand, which is beyond her capacity, but to talk, a task which is admirably suited to her, and which she never fails to perform. What is the result? Tomorrow, instead of the silence of the milliner and the grocer, an animated conversation at the Mortemarts' with Oriane telling everyone that she has heard the most marvelous music, that a certain Morel, etc., unspeakable rage of the people not invited, who will say: 'Palamède thought, no doubt, that we were unworthy; anyhow, who are these people who were giving the party?' a counterblast quite as useful as Oriane's praises, because Morel's name keeps cropping up all the time and is finally engraved in the memory like a lesson that one has read over a dozen times. All this forms a chain of circumstances that may be of value to the artist, to the hostess, may serve as a sort of megaphone for an event that will thus be made audible to a wider public. Really, it is worth the trouble; you will see what progress Charlie has made. And what is more, we have discovered a new talent in him, my dear fellow, he writes like an angel. Like an angel, I tell you."

"Since you know Bergotte," M. de Charlus went on, "I thought at one time that you might, perhaps, by refreshing his memory with regard to the youngster's writings, collaborate in short with myself, help me create a chain of circumstances to favor a twofold talent, that of a musician and a writer, which may one day acquire the prestige of that of Berlioz."³²³ You

can clearly see what you'd need to say to Bergotte.³²⁴ As you know, the Illustrious have often other things to think about, they are smothered in flattery, they take little interest except in themselves. But Bergotte, who is genuinely unpretentious and obliging, promised me that he would have *Le Gaulois*, or some such paper, publish those little articles, a blend of the humorist and the musician, which he really does quite charmingly now, and I am really very glad that Charlie should combine with his violin this little stroke of Ingres's pen.³²⁵ I know that I am prone to exaggeration, when he is concerned, like all the old fairy godmothers of the Conservatoire.³²⁶ What, my dear fellow, didn't you know that? You've never observed how gullible I am? I pace up and down for hours on end outside the examination hall. I'm as happy as a queen. As for Charlie's prose, Bergotte assured me that it was really very good indeed."

M. de Charlus, who had long been acquainted with Bergotte through Swann, had indeed gone to see him a few days before his death, to ask him to find an opening in some newspaper for Morel to write a sort of half humorous column about music. In doing so, M. de Charlus had felt some remorse, for, himself a great admirer of Bergotte, he was conscious that he never went to see him for his own sake, but in order, thanks to the respect, partly intellectual, partly social, that Bergotte felt for him, to be able to do a great service to Morel or to Mme Molé, or to some other of his friends. That he no longer made use of people in society for any other purpose did not shock M. de Charlus, but to treat Bergotte thus had appeared to him more offensive, for he felt that Bergotte did not have the calculating nature of people in society and deserved better treatment. Still, his was a busy life, and he could never find time for anything except when he was greatly interested in something, when, for example, it affected Morel. What was more, since he was himself extremely intelligent, the conversation of an intelligent man left him comparatively cold, especially that of Bergotte who was too much the man of letters for his liking and belonged to another clan, did not share his point of view. As for Bergotte, he had observed the calculated motive of M. de Charlus's visits, but had felt no resentment, for he had been incapable, throughout his life, of any sustained kindness, but was eager to give pleasure, broadminded, and insensitive to the pleasure of administering a rebuke. As for M. de Charlus's vice, he had never shared it to the smallest degree, but had found in it rather an element of color in the

person affected, *fas et nefas*,³²⁷ for an artist, consisting not in moral examples but in memories of Plato or of Il Sodoma.³²⁸

M. de Charlus omitted to say that for some time past he had been employing Morel, like those great noblemen of the seventeenth century who scorned to sign and even to write their own slanderous attacks, to compose certain vilely calumnious little paragraphs at the expense of Comtesse Molé. Their insolence apparent even to those who merely glanced at them, how much more cruel were they to the young woman herself, who found in them, so skillfully introduced that nobody but herself saw the point, certain passages from her own correspondence, textually quoted, but interpreted in a sense that made them as deadly as the cruelest revenge. They killed the young lady. But there is edited every day in Paris, Balzac would tell us, a sort of spoken newspaper, more terrible than its printed rivals. We will see later that this verbal press reduced to nothing the power of a Charlus, who had fallen out of fashion, and exalted far above him a Morel, who was not worth the millionth part of his former patron.³²⁹ Is this intellectual fashion really so naïve, and does it sincerely believe in the nullity of a Charlus of genius, in the incontestable authority of a crass Morel? The baron was not so innocent in his implacable vengeance. Whence, no doubt, that bitter venom on his tongue, the spreading of which seemed to dye his cheeks with jaundice when he was in a rage.

“I really wish that Bergotte could have come this evening, for he would have heard Charlie in the things that he truly plays best. But I understand that he doesn’t go out, that he doesn’t want to be bothered, and he’s certainly right. But you, fair youth, we never see you at quai Conti. You don’t abuse their hospitality!”

I explained that I went out as a rule with my cousin.

“Do you hear that! He goes out with his cousin! What a most particularly pure young man!” said M. de Charlus to Brichot. Then, turning again to me: “But we are not asking you to give an account of your life, my boy. You are free to do anything that amuses you. We merely regret that we have no share in it. Besides, you show very good taste, your cousin is charming, ask Brichot, she quite turned his head at Douville. We will regret her absence this evening. But you did just as well, perhaps, not to bring her with you. Vinteuil’s music is delightful. But I have heard this morning from Charlie that we are to meet the composer’s daughter and her friend, two people who

have a terrible reputation. That sort of thing is always awkward for a girl. I'm even a bit concerned because of my guests. But since they are almost all of a venerable age, that's of no consequence to them. They are sure to be there, unless the two young ladies have been unable to come, for they were to have been present without fail all afternoon at a rehearsal that Mme Verdurin was giving earlier, to which she had invited only the bores, her family, the people whom she could not very well have this evening. But a moment ago, before dinner, Charlie told us that the demoiselles Vinteuil, as we call them, though absolutely expected, never came."

Notwithstanding the intense pain that I felt at the sudden association with its effect, of which alone I had been aware, with its cause, finally discovered, of Albertine's desire to be there that afternoon with the expected attendance (unknown to me) of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, I still had the presence of mind to notice that M. de Charlus, who had told us, a few minutes earlier that he had not seen Charlie since the morning, was now brazenly admitting that he had seen him before dinner. But my pain was becoming visible.

"Why, what is the matter with you?" said the baron. "You are quite green; come, let us go in, you will catch cold, you don't look at all well."

It was not my first doubt as to Albertine's virtue that M. de Charlus's words had awakened in me. Many other doubts had penetrated my mind already; at each new doubt we feel that the measure is heaped full, that we cannot cope with it, then we manage to find room for it all the same, and once it is introduced into our vital essence, it enters into competition there with so many longings to believe, so many reasons to forget, that we speedily become accustomed to it, and end by ceasing to pay it any attention. It lies there dormant like a partly healed pain, a mere threat of suffering, which, the counterpart of desire, a feeling of the same order that has become, like it, the focus of our thoughts, irradiates them from infinite distances with a wistful melancholy, as desire irradiates them with unidentifiable pleasures, wherever anything can be associated with the person with whom we are in love. But pain revives as soon as a new doubt enters our mind intact, even if we assure ourselves almost immediately: "I will deal with this, there must be some method to avoid suffering, it cannot be true," nevertheless there has been a first moment in which we suffered as though we believed it. If we had merely limbs, such as legs and arms, life would be endurable. Unfortunately, we carry inside us that little organ we

call the heart, which is subject to certain maladies in the course of which it is infinitely impressionable by everything that concerns the life of a certain person, so that a lie—that most harmless of things, in the midst of which we live so unconcernedly, if the lie be told by ourselves or by others—coming from that person, causes the little heart, which surgeons ought really to be able to remove from us, intolerable anguish. Let us not speak of the brain, for our mind may go on reasoning interminably in the course of this anguish, it does no more to mitigate it than by thinking can we soothe an aching tooth. It is true that this person is to blame for having lied to us, for she had sworn to us that she would always tell us the truth. But we know from our own shortcomings, toward other people, how little an oath is worth. And we have deliberately believed them when they came from her, the very person in whose interest it has always been to lie to us, and whom, moreover, we did not select for her virtues. It is true that, later on, she would almost cease to have any need to lie to us—at the moment when our heart will have grown indifferent to her lying—because then we will no longer take an interest in her life. We know this, and, notwithstanding, we deliberately sacrifice our own life, either by killing ourself for her sake, or by letting ourself be sentenced to death for having murdered her, or simply by spending, in the course of a few evenings, our whole fortune upon her, which will oblige us presently to commit suicide because we have nothing left in the world. Besides, however calm we may imagine ourself when we are in love, we always have love in our heart in a state of unstable equilibrium. A trifle is sufficient to exalt it to the position of happiness, we radiate happiness, we smother in our affection not her whom we love, but those who have given us merit in her eyes, who have protected her from every evil temptation; we think that our mind is at ease, and a word is sufficient: “Gilberte is not coming,” “Mademoiselle Vinteuil is expected,” to make all the preconceived happiness toward which we were rising collapse, to make the sun hide its face, to open the bag of the winds³³⁰ and let loose the internal tempest that one day we will be incapable of resisting. That day, the day upon which the heart has become so fragile, our friends who admire us are pained that such trifles, that certain persons, can so affect us, can bring us to death’s door. But what are they to do? If a poet is dying of septic pneumonia,³³¹ can one imagine his friends explaining to the pneumococcus that the poet is a man of talent and that it ought to let him recover? My doubt, insofar as it referred to Mlle Vinteuil, was not entirely

new. But to a certain extent, my jealousy of the afternoon, aroused by Léa and her friends, had abolished it. Once that danger of the Trocadéro was removed, I had felt, I had believed that I had recaptured for all time complete peace of mind. But what was entirely new to me was a certain excursion about which Andrée had told me: "We went to this place and that, we didn't meet anyone," and during which, on the contrary, Mlle Vinteuil had evidently arranged to meet Albertine at Mme Verdurin's. At this moment I would gladly have allowed Albertine to go out by herself, to go wherever she might choose, provided that I might lock up Mlle Vinteuil and her friend somewhere and be certain that Albertine would not meet them. The fact is that jealousy is, as a rule, partial, of intermittent application, whether because it is the painful extension of an anxiety that is provoked now by one person, now by another with whom our mistress may be in love, or because of the exiguity of our thought that is able to realize only what it can represent to itself and leaves everything else in an obscurity that can cause us to suffer relatively little.

Just as we were about to enter the courtyard of the hôtel we were overtaken by Saniette, who had not at first recognized us. "I envisaged you, however, for some time," he told us in a breathless voice. "Is it aught but curious that I should have hesitated?"

To say "Is it not curious" would have seemed to him wrong, and he had acquired a familiarity with obsolete forms of speech that was becoming exasperating. "Although you are people whom one may acknowledge as friends." His gray complexion seemed to be illuminated by the livid glow of a storm. His breathlessness, which had been noticeable, as recently as last summer, only when M. Verdurin "jumped down his throat," was now continuous.

"I understand that an unknown work of Vinteuil is to be performed by excellent artists, and singularly by Morel."

"Why singularly?" inquired the baron, who detected a criticism in the adverb. "Our friend Saniette," Brichot made haste to exclaim, acting as interpreter, "is prone to speak, like the excellent scholar that he is, the language of an age in which 'singularly' was equivalent to our 'particularly.'"

As we entered the Verdurins' hall, M. de Charlus asked me whether I was engaged upon any work and as I told him that I was not, but that I was greatly interested at the moment in old dinner services of silver and

porcelain, he assured me that I could not see any finer than those that the Verdurins had; that, moreover, I might have seen them at La Raspelière, since, on the pretext that one's possessions are also one's friends, they were so foolish as to cart everything down there with them; it would be less convenient to bring everything out for my benefit on the evening of a party, but that, nevertheless, he would ask them to show me anything that I wished to see. I begged him not to do anything of the sort. M. de Charlus unbuttoned his overcoat, took off his hat, and I saw that the top of his head had now turned silver in patches. But like a precious shrub that is not only colored with autumn tints but certain leaves of which are protected by bandages of cotton wool or incrustations of plaster, M. de Charlus received from these few white hairs at his crest only a further variegation added to those of his face. And yet, even beneath the layers of different expressions, of makeup and of hypocrisy that formed such a bad "make-up," his face continued to hide from almost everyone the secret that it seemed to me to be crying aloud. I was almost put to shame by his eyes, in which I was afraid of his surprising me in the act of reading it as in an open book, by his voice that seemed to me to be repeating it in every tone, with an untiring indecency. But secrets are well kept by such people, for everyone who comes in contact with them is deaf and blind. The people who learned the truth from someone else, from the Verdurins for example, believed it, but only for so long as they had not met M. de Charlus. His face, so far from spreading, dispelled every scandalous rumor. For we form so extravagant an idea of certain entities that we would be incapable of identifying it with the familiar features of a person of our acquaintance. And we find it difficult to believe in such a person's vices, just as we can never believe in the genius of a person with whom we went to the Opéra last night.

M. de Charlus was engaged in handing over his overcoat with the instructions of a familiar guest. But the footman to whom he was handing it was a newcomer, and quite young. Now M. de Charlus had by this time begun, as people say, to "lose his bearings" and did not always remember what might and what might not be done. The praiseworthy desire that he had felt at Balbec to show that certain topics did not alarm him, that he was not afraid to declare with regard to someone or other: "He is a good-looking boy," to utter, in short, the same words as might have been uttered by somebody who was not like himself, this desire he had now begun to express by saying on the contrary things that nobody could ever have said

who was not like him, things upon which his mind was so constantly fixed that he forgot that they do not form part of the habitual preoccupation of people in general. And so, as he gazed at the new footman, he raised his forefinger in the air in a menacing fashion and, thinking that he was making an excellent joke: “You are not to make eyes at me like that, do you hear?” said the baron, and, turning to Brichot: “He has a quaint little face, that boy, his nose is rather fun,” and, completing his joke, or yielding to a desire, he lowered his forefinger horizontally, hesitated for an instant, then, unable to control himself any longer, thrust it irresistibly forward at the footman and touched the tip of his nose, saying “Pif!” then entered the drawing room followed by Brichot, myself, and Saniette, who told us that Princess Sherbatoff had died at six o’clock.

“What a strange bird!” the footman said to himself, and inquired of his companions whether the baron was a joker or a madman. “It is just a way he has,” said the butler (who regarded the baron as slightly “touched,” “a bit balmy”), “but he is one of Madame’s friends for whom I have always had the greatest respect, he has a good heart.”

At this moment M. Verdurin appeared to welcome us. Saniette, not without fear of catching cold, for the outer door was continually being opened, stood waiting resignedly for someone to take his hat and coat.

“What are you hanging about there for, like a whipped dog?” M. Verdurin asked him.

“I am waiting until one of the persons who are charged with the cloakroom can take my coat and give me a number.”

“What is that you say?” demanded M. Verdurin with a stern expression. “‘Charged with the cloakroom?’ Are you going gaga? ‘In charge of the cloakroom,’ is what we say, if we’ve got to teach you to speak your own language, like a man who has had a stroke.”

“Charged with a thing is the correct form,” murmured Saniette in a halting tone; “the abbé Le Batteux . . .”[332](#)

“You make me tired, you do,” cried M. Verdurin in a voice of thunder. “How you do wheeze! Have you been running upstairs to an attic?”

The effect of M. Verdurin’s rudeness was that the servants in the cloakroom allowed other guests to take precedence over Saniette and, when he tried to hand over his things, replied: “Wait for your turn, Monsieur, don’t be in such a hurry.”

“There’s system for you, there’s competence, that’s right, my lads,” said M. Verdurin with an approving smile, in order to encourage them in their tendency to keep Saniette waiting till the last. “Come along,” he said to us, “the creature wants us all to catch our death hanging about in his beloved draft. Come and get warm in the drawing room. ‘Charged with the cloakroom,’ indeed, what an idiot!”

“He is inclined to be a little precious, but he’s not a bad fellow,” said Brichot.

“I never said that he was a bad fellow, I said that he was an idiot,” was M. Verdurin’s harsh retort.

“Are you coming back this year to Incarville?” Brichot asked me. “I believe that our hostess has taken La Raspelière again, for all that she has had a bone to pick with her landlords. But that is nothing, a mere passing cloud,” he added in the optimistic tone of the newspapers that say: “Mistakes have been made, it is true, but who does not make mistakes at times?” But I remembered the state of anguish in which I had left Balbec and felt no desire to return there. I kept putting off to the next day my plans for Albertine. “Why, of course, he is coming back, we need him, he is indispensable to us,” declared M. de Charlus with the authoritative and uncomprehending egoism of amiability.

Monsieur Verdurin, to whom we expressed our sympathy over Princess Sherbatoff, said: “Yes, I believe she is rather ill.”

“No, no, she died at six o’clock,” exclaimed Saniette.

“Oh, you exaggerate everything,” was M. Verdurin’s brutal reply, for, since he had not canceled the party, he preferred the hypothesis of illness. [333](#)

Meanwhile, Mme Verdurin was busily engaged with Cottard and Ski. Morel had just declined (because M. de Charlus could not be present) an invitation from some friends of hers to whom she had promised the services of the violinist. The reason for Morel’s refusal to perform at the party that the Verdurins’ friends were giving, a reason that we will presently see reinforced by others of a far more serious kind, might have found its justification in a habit common to the leisured classes in general but particularly to the little nucleus. To be sure, if Mme Verdurin intercepted between a newcomer and one of the faithful a whispered exchange that might let it be supposed that they knew each other or wished to become better acquainted (“On Friday, then, at So-and-So’s,” or “Come to the

studio any day you like; I am always there until five o'clock, I will look forward to seeing you"), she would become restless and excited, supposing the newcomer to occupy a "position" that would make him a brilliant recruit to the little clan, and while pretending not to have heard anything, and preserving in her fine eyes, ringed with dark shadows by the habit of listening to Debussy more than they would have been by that of sniffing cocaine, the exhausted expression induced by musical intoxication alone, would revolve nevertheless behind her splendid brow, bulging with all those quartets and the migraines that were their consequence, thoughts that were not exclusively polyphonic, and unable to contain herself any longer, unable to postpone the injection for another instant, would fling herself upon the two speakers, draw them apart, and say to the newcomer, pointing to the "faithful" one: "You wouldn't care to come and dine to meet *him*, next Saturday, shall we say, or any day you like, with some really nice people! Don't speak too loud, as I don't want to invite all this mob" (a word used to designate for five minutes the little nucleus, disdained for the moment in favor of the newcomer in whom so many hopes were placed).

But this need for new infatuations, this need to bring people together, had its counterpart. Assiduous attendance at their Wednesdays aroused in the Verdurins an opposite tendency. This was the desire to quarrel, to hold aloof. It had been strengthened, had almost been wrought to a frenzy during the months spent at La Raspelière, where they were all together morning, noon, and night. M. Verdurin went out of his way to prove one of his guests in the wrong, to spin webs in which he might hand over to his companion spider some innocent fly. Failing a grievance, he would invent some absurdity. As soon as one of the faithful had been out of the house for half an hour, they would make fun of him in front of the others, would feign surprise that their guests had not noticed how his teeth were never clean, or how on the contrary he had a mania for brushing them twenty times a day. If anyone took the liberty of opening a window, this lack of breeding would cause a glance of disgust to pass between host and hostess. A moment later Mme Verdurin would ask for a shawl, which gave M. Verdurin an excuse for saying in a furious tone: "No, I will close the window, I wonder who had the impertinence to open it," in the hearing of the guilty wretch who blushed to the roots of his hair. You were rebuked indirectly for the quantity of wine that you had drunk. "Doesn't it make you ill? The working class thrives on it!" If two of the faithful went out together without first obtaining

permission from the Mistress, their promenades led to endless comments, however innocent they might be. Those of M. de Charlus with Morel were not innocent. It was only the fact that M. de Charlus was not staying at La Raspelière (because Morel was obliged to live near his barracks) that retarded the hour of satiety, disgust, retching. That hour was, however, about to strike.

Mme Verdurin was furious and determined to “enlighten” Morel as to the ridiculous and detestable role that M. de Charlus was making him play. “I must add,” she went on (for when she felt that she owed anyone a debt of gratitude that would weigh upon her and was unable to rid herself of it by killing him, she would discover a serious defect in him that would honorably dispense her from showing her gratitude), “I must add that he gives himself airs in my house, which I do not at all like.” The truth was that Mme Verdurin had another more serious reason than Morel’s refusal to play at her friends’ party for being angry with M. de Charlus. The latter, so puffed up with pride by the honor he was doing the Mistress in bringing to quai Conti people who after all would never have come there for her sake, had, on hearing the first names that Mme Verdurin had suggested as those of people who ought to be invited, pronounced the most categorical ban upon them in a peremptory tone that blended the rancorous pride of a crotchety nobleman with the dogmatism of the expert artist in questions of entertainment who would cancel his program and withhold his collaboration sooner than agree to concessions that, in his opinion, would endanger the success of the whole. M. de Charlus had given his approval, hedging it around with reservations, to Saintine alone, with whom, in order not to be bothered with his wife, Mme de Guermantes had passed, from a daily intimacy, to a complete severance of relations, but whom M. de Charlus, finding him intelligent, continued to see. True, it was in a bourgeois milieu, with a crossbreeding of the minor nobility, where everyone is very rich and related by marriage to an aristocracy whom the true aristocracy does not know, that Saintine, at one time the flower of the Guermantes set, had gone to seek his fortune and, he imagined, a social foothold. But Mme Verdurin, knowing the blue-blooded pretensions of the wife’s circle, and failing to take into account the husband’s position (for it is what is immediately over our head that gives us the impression of altitude and not what is almost invisible to us, so far is it lost in the clouds), felt that she ought to justify an invitation for Saintine by pointing out that he knew a great many people,

“having married Mlle X.” The ignorance that this assertion, the direct opposite of the truth, revealed in Mme Verdurin caused the baron’s painted lips to part in a smile of indulgent scorn and wide comprehension. He disdained a direct answer, but as he was always ready to express in social matters theories that showed the fertility of his mind and the arrogance of his pride, with the inherited frivolity of his preoccupations: “Saintine ought to have consulted me before marrying,” he said; “there is such a thing as social as well as physiological eugenics, and I am perhaps the only specialist in existence. Saintine’s case aroused no discussion, it was clear that, in making the marriage that he made, he was tying a stone to his neck, and hiding his light under a bushel. His social career was at an end. I would have explained this to him, and he would have understood me, for he is quite intelligent. On the other hand, there was a certain person who had everything that he required to make his position exalted, predominant, worldwide, only a terrible cable bound him to the earth. I helped him, partly by pressure, partly by force, to break his moorings and now he has won, with a triumphant joy, the freedom, the omnipotence that he owes to me. It required, perhaps, a little determination on his part, but what a reward! Thus a man can himself, when he has the sense to listen to me, become the midwife of his destiny.” It was only too clear that M. de Charlus had not been able to influence his own; action is a different thing from words, however eloquent, and from thought, however ingenious. “But, so far as I am concerned, I live the life of a philosopher who looks on with interest at the social reactions that I have foretold, but who does not assist them. And so I have continued to visit Saintine, who has always received me with the whole-hearted deference that is my due. I have even dined with him in his new abode, where one is as terribly bored, in the midst of the most sumptuous splendor, as one used to be amused in the old days when, living from hand to mouth, he used to assemble the best society in a little attic. Him, then, you may invite, I authorize it, but I rule out with my veto all the other names that you have proposed. And you will thank me for it, for, if I am an expert in arranging marriages, I am no less an expert in arranging parties. I know the rising personalities who can lift a gathering, make it take flight; and I know also the names that bring it down to the ground, make it fall flat.” These exclusions were not always founded upon the baron’s dotty resentments nor upon his artistic refinements, but rather upon his skill as an actor. When he had perfected, at the expense of somebody or something, an

entirely successful epigram, he was eager to let it be heard by the largest possible audience but took care not to admit to the second performance the people invited to the first who could have borne witness that the novelty was not novel. He would then invite a new audience precisely because he did not alter his program, and, when he had scored a success in conversation, would, if need be, have organized a tour, and given performances in the provinces. Whatever may have been the various motives for these exclusions, they did not merely annoy Mme Verdurin, who felt her authority as a hostess impaired, they also did her great damage socially, and for two reasons. The first was that M. de Charlus, even more easily offended than Jupien, used to quarrel, without anyone's ever knowing why, with the people who were most suited to be his friends. Naturally, one of the first punishments that he could inflict upon them was that of not allowing them to be invited to a party that he was giving at the Verdurins'. Now these pariahs were often people who are in the habit of ruling the roost, as the saying goes, but who in M. de Charlus's eyes had ceased to rule it from the day on which he had quarreled with them. For his imagination, in addition to finding people in the wrong in order to quarrel with them, was no less ingenious in stripping them of all importance as soon as they ceased to be his friends. If, for example, the guilty person came from an extremely old family, whose dukedom, however, dates only from the nineteenth century, such a family as the Montesquiou,³³⁴ from that moment all that counted for M. de Charlus was the ancientness of the dukedom, the family becoming nothing. "They are not even dukes," he would exclaim. "It is the title of the Abbé de Montesquiou that passed most irregularly to a collateral, less than eighty years ago. The present duke, if duke he can be called, is the third. You may talk to me if you like of people like the Uzès, the La Trémoilles, the Luynes, who are tenth or fourteenth dukes, or my brother who is twelfth Duc de Guermantes and seventeenth Prince de Condom."³³⁵ The Montesquiou are descended from an old family, but what would that prove, supposing that it were proved? They have descended so far that they have reached the fourteenth story below stairs." Had he on the contrary quarreled with a gentleman who possessed an ancient dukedom, who boasted the most magnificent connections, was related to ruling princes, but to whose line this distinction had come quite suddenly without any length of pedigree, a Luynes for instance, the case

was altered, pedigree alone counted. “I ask you—M. Alberti,³³⁶ who does not emerge from the mire until Louis XIII! What can it matter to us that favoritism at court allowed them to pick up dukedoms to which they have no right?” What was more, with M. de Charlus, the fall came immediately after the exaltation because of that tendency peculiar to the Guermantes to expect from conversation, from friendship, something that these are incapable of giving, as well as the symptomatic fear of becoming the objects of slander. And the fall was all the greater, the higher the exaltation had been. Now nobody had ever found such favor with the baron as he had ostentatiously shown for Comtesse Molé. By what sign of indifference did she reveal, one fine day, that she had been unworthy of it? The countess always maintained that she had never been able to discover the answer. The fact remains that the mere sound of her name aroused in the baron the most violent rage, provoked the most eloquent but the most terrible philippics. Mme Verdurin, to whom Mme Molé had been very amiable, and who was founding, as we will see, great hopes upon her and had rejoiced in anticipation at the thought that the countess would meet in her house all the noblest names, as the Mistress said, “of France and Navarre,” at once proposed to invite “Madame de Molé.” “Oh, my God! It takes all sorts to make a world,” M. de Charlus had replied, “and if you, Madame, feel a desire to converse with Mme Pipelet,³³⁷ Mme Gibout, and Mme Joseph Prudhomme,³³⁸ I ask nothing better, but let it be on an evening when I am not present. I could see as soon as you opened your mouth that we do not speak the same language, since I was speaking of aristocratic names, and you retort with the most obscure names of lawyers, of devious little commoners, pernicious scandalmongers, of little ladies who imagine themselves patronesses of the arts because they repeat, an octave lower, the manners of my Guermantes sister-in-law, like a jay that thinks it is imitating a peacock. I must add that it would be positively indecent to admit to a party that I am pleased to give at Mme Verdurin’s a person whom I have with good reason excluded from my society, a goose devoid of birth, loyalty, intelligence, who is so idiotic as to suppose that she is capable of playing the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes, a combination that is in itself idiotic, since the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princesse de Guermantes are poles apart. It is as though a person should pretend to be at once Reichenberg³³⁹ and Sarah Bernhardt.³⁴⁰ In any case,

even if it were not contradictory, it would be extremely ridiculous. Even though I may, myself, smile at times at the exaggerations of the one and regret the limitations of the other, that is my right. But that little bourgeois frog trying to swell herself up to the magnitude of two great ladies who, at all events, always reveal the incomparable distinction of blood, it is enough, as the saying goes, to make a cat laugh. The Molé! That is a name that must not be uttered in my hearing, or else I must simply withdraw,” he concluded with a smile, in the tone of a doctor, who, thinking of his patient’s interests in spite of that same patient’s opposition, lets it be understood that he will not tolerate the collaboration of a homoeopath. On the other hand, certain persons whom M. de Charlus regarded as negligible might indeed be so for him but not for Mme Verdurin. M. de Charlus, from the height of his exalted birth, could afford to dispense with the most elegant people, the assemblage of whom would have made Mme Verdurin’s drawing room one of the first in Paris. She, at the same time, was beginning to feel that she had already on many occasions missed the boat, not to mention the enormous setbacks that the social error of the Dreyfus Affair had inflicted upon her, not without doing her a service all the same. I forget whether I have mentioned the disapproval with which the Duchesse de Guermantes had observed certain persons of her world who, subordinating everything else to the Affair, excluded fashionable women from their drawing rooms and admitted others who were not fashionable, because they were for or against a retrial, and had then been criticized in her turn by those same ladies, as lukewarm, unsound in her views, and guilty of placing social distinctions above the national interests; may I appeal to the reader, as to a friend with regard to whom one completely forgets, after so many conversations, whether one has remembered, or had an opportunity to tell him something important? Whether I have done so or not, the attitude of the Duchesse de Guermantes at that time can easily be imagined, and indeed if we look at it in the light of subsequent history may appear, from the social point of view, perfectly correct. M. de Cambremer regarded the Dreyfus Affair as a foreign machination intended to destroy the Intelligence Service, to undermine discipline, to weaken the army, to divide the French people, to pave the way for invasion. Literature being, apart from a few of La Fontaine’s fables,³⁴¹ a sealed book to the marquis, he left it to his wife to prove that the cruelly observant writers of the day had, by creating a spirit of irreverence, arrived by a parallel course at a similar result. “M.

Reinach³⁴² and M. Hervieu³⁴³ are in cahoots,” she would say. Nobody will accuse the Dreyfus Affair of having premeditated such dark designs upon society. But there it certainly has broken down the barriers. Society people who refuse to allow politics into their world are as farsighted as soldiers who refuse to allow politics to permeate the army. Society is like sexual appetite; no one knows at what forms of perversion it may arrive, once we have allowed our choices to be dictated by esthetic considerations. The Faubourg Saint-Germain got into the habit of entertaining ladies from another class of society because they were nationalists; the reason vanished with nationalism; the habit remained. Mme Verdurin, by the bond of Dreyfusism, had attracted to her house certain writers of distinction who for the moment were of no advantage to her socially, because they were Dreyfusards. But political passions are like all the rest, they do not last. New generations arise that are incapable of understanding them; even the generation that experienced them changes, experiences political passions that, not being modeled exactly upon their predecessors, make it rehabilitate some of the excluded, the reason for exclusion having altered. Monarchists no longer cared, at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, whether a man had been a republican, that is to say a radical, that is to say anticlerical, provided that he was an anti-Semite and a nationalist. Should a war ever come, patriotism would assume another form and if a writer was chauvinistic nobody would stop to think whether he had or had not been a Dreyfusard. It was thus that, at each political crisis, at each artistic revival, Mme Verdurin had collected one by one, like a bird building its nest, the several scraps, useless for the moment, of what would one day be her salon. The Dreyfus Affair had passed, Anatole France³⁴⁴ remained. Mme Verdurin’s strength lay in her genuine love of art, the trouble that she took for her faithful, the marvelous dinners that she gave for them alone, without inviting anyone from fashionable society. Each of the faithful was treated at her table as Bergotte had been treated at Mme Swann’s. When a familiar guest of this sort had turned into an illustrious man whom everybody was longing to meet, his presence at Mme Verdurin’s had none of the artificial, adulterated aspect of a dish at an official or farewell banquet, cooked by Potel or Chabot,³⁴⁵ but was merely a delicious “ordinary” that you would have found there in the same perfection on a day when there was no party at all. At Mme Verdurin’s the cast was trained to perfection, the repertory most select, all that was

lacking was an audience. And now that public taste had begun to turn from the rational and French art of a Bergotte, and to go in, above all things, for exotic forms of music, Mme Verdurin, a sort of official representative in Paris of all foreign artists, was soon to serve, by the side of the exquisite Princess Yourbeletief,³⁴⁶ as an aged Fairy Godmother,³⁴⁷ grim but all-powerful, to the Russian dancers. This charming invasion, against whose seductions only the stupidest of critics protested, infected Paris, as we know, with a fever of curiosity less burning, more purely esthetic, but quite as intense perhaps as that aroused by the Dreyfus Affair. There again Mme Verdurin, but with a very different result socially, was to take her place in the front row. Just as she had been seen by the side of Mme Zola,³⁴⁸ immediately below the judges' bench, during the trial in the Assize Court,³⁴⁹ so when the new generation, in their enthusiasm for the Ballets Russes, thronged to the Opéra, crowned with the latest novelty of aigrettes, they invariably saw in a stage box Mme Verdurin by the side of Princess Yourbeletief. And just as, after the emotionally charged sessions at the Palais de Justice, people used to go in the evening to Mme Verdurin's, to meet Picquart³⁵⁰ or Labori³⁵¹ in the flesh and what was more to hear the latest news about the Affair, to learn what hopes might be placed in Zurlinden,³⁵² Loubet,³⁵³ Colonel Jouaust,³⁵⁴ the Regulations, so now, little inclined for sleep after the enthusiasm aroused by *Scheherazade*³⁵⁵ or the dances from *Prince Igor*,³⁵⁶ they would again repair to Mme Verdurin's, where under the auspices of Princess Yourbeletief and their hostess, an exquisite supper brought together every night the dancers themselves, who had abstained from dinner so as to be more resilient, their director, their designers, the great composers Igor Stravinsky³⁵⁷ and Richard Strauss,³⁵⁸ a permanent little nucleus, around which, as around the supper table of M. and Mme Helvétius,³⁵⁹ the greatest ladies in Paris and foreign royalties were not too proud to gather. Even those people in society who professed to be endowed with taste and drew unnecessary distinctions between the various Russian ballets, regarding the setting of the *Sylphides*³⁶⁰ as somehow "purer" than that of *Scheherazade*, which they were almost prepared to attribute to the inspiration of Negro art, were enchanted to meet face to face the great innovators of theatrical taste, who in an art that is

perhaps a little more artificial than that of painting had created a revolution as profound as Impressionism itself.

To revert to M. de Charlus, Mme Verdurin would not have minded so much if he had placed on his Index only Mme Bontemps, whom she had picked out at Odette's on the strength of her love of the fine arts, and who during the Dreyfus Affair had come to dinner occasionally with her husband, whom Mme Verdurin called "lukewarm," because he was not making any move for a new trial, but who, being extremely intelligent, and glad to form relations in every camp, was delighted to show his independence by dining at the same table as Labori, to whom he listened without uttering a word that might compromise himself, but managed to slip in at the right moment a tribute to the loyalty, recognized by all parties, of Jaurès.³⁶¹ But the baron had similarly proscribed several ladies of the aristocracy with whom Mme Verdurin, on the occasion of some musical festivity or a collection for charity, had recently formed an acquaintance and who, whatever M. de Charlus might think of them, would have been, far more than himself, essential to the formation of a new nucleus, this time aristocratic. Mme Verdurin had indeed been counting on this party to mingle her new friends with ladies of the same set whom M. de Charlus would be bringing, and had been relishing in anticipation the surprise of the former on meeting at quai Conti their own friends or relations invited there by the baron. She was disappointed and furious at his veto. It remained to be seen whether the evening, under these conditions, would result in profit or loss to herself. The loss would not be too serious if, at least, M. de Charlus's guests came with so friendly a feeling for Mme Verdurin that they would become her friends in the future. In this case the harm would be only half done, these two sections of fashionable society, which the baron had insisted upon keeping apart, would be united later on, he himself being excluded, of course, on that particular evening. And so Mme Verdurin was awaiting the baron's guests with a certain apprehension. It would not be long before she discovered the state of mind in which they came, and the kind of relationship that she might have with them. While she waited, Mme Verdurin took counsel with the faithful, but, upon seeing M. de Charlus enter the room with Brichot and me, stopped short.

To our great astonishment, when Brichot told her how sorry he was to learn that her dear friend was so seriously ill, Mme Verdurin replied: "Listen, I am obliged to confess that I am not at all sorry. It is useless to

feign emotions one does not feel.” No doubt she spoke thus from want of energy, because she shrank from the idea of wearing a long face throughout her party, from pride, in order not to appear to be seeking excuses for not having canceled the event, from self-respect also and social aptitude, because the absence of grief that she displayed was more honorable if it could be attributed to a peculiar antipathy, suddenly revealed, for the princess, rather than to a general insensitivity, and because her hearers could not fail to be disarmed by a sincerity as to which there could be no doubt: for if Mme Verdurin had not been genuinely indifferent to the death of the princess, would she have gone on to excuse herself for giving the party, by accusing herself of a far more serious fault? Besides, one was apt to forget that Mme Verdurin would thus have admitted, while confessing her grief, that she had not had the strength of mind to forgo a pleasure; whereas the indifference of the friend was something more shocking, more immoral, but less humiliating, and consequently easier to confess than the frivolity of the hostess. In matters of crime, where the culprit is in danger, it is his material interest that prompts the confession. Where the fault incurs no penalty, it is self-esteem. Whether it was that, doubtless finding too hackneyed the pretext of people who, in order not to allow a bereavement to interrupt their life of pleasure, go about saying that it seems to them useless to display the outward signs of a grief that they feel in their hearts, Mme Verdurin preferred to imitate those intelligent culprits who are revolted by the clichés of innocence and whose defense—a partial admission, though they do not know it—consists in saying that they would see no harm in doing what they are accused of doing, although, as it happens, they have had no occasion to do it, or that, having adopted, to explain her conduct, the theory of indifference, she found, once she had started on the downward slope of her unnatural feeling, that it was distinctly original to have felt it, that she displayed a rare perspicacity in having managed to diagnose it, and a certain “nerve” in proclaiming it; Mme Verdurin kept dwelling upon her lack of grief, not without a certain proud satisfaction, as of a paradoxical psychologist and daring dramatist. “Yes, it is very funny,” she said, “I hardly felt it. Good heavens, I don’t mean to say that I wouldn’t rather she were still alive, she was not a bad person.”

“Yes, she was,” put in M. Verdurin.

“Ah! He doesn’t approve of her because he thought that I was doing myself harm by having her here, but he is quite pig-headed about that.”

“Do me the justice to admit,” said M. Verdurin, “that I never approved of your having her. I always told you that she had a bad reputation.”

“But I have never heard a thing against her,” protested Saniette.

“What!” exclaimed Mme Verdurin, “everybody knew; bad isn’t the word, it was shameful, despicable. No, but it has nothing to do with that. I couldn’t explain, myself, what I felt; I didn’t dislike her, but I took so little interest in her that, when we heard that she was seriously ill, my husband himself was quite surprised, and said: ‘Anyone would think that you didn’t care.’ Why, this evening, he offered to put off the rehearsal, and I insisted upon having it, because I would have thought it a farce to show a grief that I do not feel.” She said this because she felt that it had a curious smack of the “Théâtre-Libre,”³⁶² and was at the same time singularly convenient; for an admitted insensitivity or immorality simplifies life as much as does easy virtue; it converts reproachable actions, for which one no longer need seek any excuse, into a duty imposed by sincerity. And the faithful listened to Mme Verdurin’s words with the blend of admiration and misgiving that certain cruelly realistic and painfully observant plays used at one time to cause, and, while they marveled to see their beloved Mistress display a new aspect of her rectitude and independence, more than one of them, albeit he assured himself that after all it would not be the same thing, thought of his own death, and asked himself whether, on the day when death came to him, they would shed a tear or give a party at quai Conti.

“I am very glad that the party has not been canceled, for my guests’ sake,” said M. de Charlus, not realizing that in expressing himself thus he was offending Mme Verdurin.

Meanwhile I was struck, as was everybody who approached Mme Verdurin that evening, by a far from pleasant odor of rhinogomenol.³⁶³ The reason was as follows. We know that Mme Verdurin never expressed her artistic feelings in a moral, but always in a physical fashion, so that they might appear more inevitable and more profound. So, if one spoke to her of Vinteuil’s music, her favorite, she remained unmoved, as though she expected to derive no emotion from it. But after looking at you for a few moments with a fixed, almost abstracted gaze, she would answer you in a sharp, matter of fact, scarcely civil tone (as though she had said to you: “I don’t in the least mind your smoking, it’s because of the carpet; it’s a very fine one, not that that matters either, but it’s highly flammable, I’m dreadfully afraid of fire, and I wouldn’t like to see you all roasted because

someone had carelessly dropped a cigarette butt on it"). It was the same with Vinteuil. If anyone mentioned him, she professed no admiration, but after a moment she coldly expressed her regret that something by him was being played that evening. "I have nothing against Vinteuil; to my mind, he is the greatest composer of the age, only I can never listen to that sort of stuff without weeping all the time" (she did not apply any pathos to the word "weeping," she would have used precisely the same tone for "sleeping"; certain gossip-mongers used indeed to insist that the latter verb would have been more applicable, though no one could ever be certain, for she listened to the music with her face buried in her hands, and certain snoring sounds might after all have been sobs). "I don't mind weeping, not in the least; only I get the most appalling colds afterward. It stuffs up my mucous membrane, and two days later I look like an old drunk. I have to inhale for days on end to get my vocal cords to function. However, one of Cottard's students . . . Oh! By the way, I never offered you my condolences, he was taken away very quickly, the poor professor! Ah, well, what can you do, he died, as everyone must.³⁶⁴ He had killed enough people for it to be his turn to get a taste of his own medicine. But, as I was saying, one of his own students, a delightful person has been treating me for it. He goes by quite an original rule: 'Prevention is better than cure.'³⁶⁵ And he greases my nose before the music begins. It is radical. I can weep like all the mothers who ever lost a child, not a trace of a cold. Sometimes a little conjunctivitis, but that's all. It is absolutely efficacious. Otherwise I could never have gone on listening to Vinteuil. I was just going from one bronchitis to another."

I could not refrain from mentioning Mlle Vinteuil. "Isn't the composer's daughter to be here," I asked Mme Verdurin, "with one of her friends?"

"No, I have just had a telegram," Mme Verdurin said evasively, "they have been obliged to remain in the country."

I had a momentary hope that there might never have been any question of their leaving it and that Mme Verdurin had announced the presence of these representatives of the composer only in order to make a favorable impression upon the performers and their audience.

"What, didn't they come, then, to the rehearsal this afternoon?" came with a feigned curiosity from the baron, who was eager to let it appear that he had not seen Charlie. The latter came up to greet me. I whispered a question in his ear about Mlle Vinteuil. He seemed to me to know little or nothing about her. I signaled to him to keep his voice low and told him that

we would discuss the matter later on. He bowed and assured me that he would be delighted to place himself entirely at my disposal. I observed that he was far more polite, more respectful, than he had been in the past. I spoke warmly of him—who might perhaps be able to help me to clear up my suspicions—to M. de Charlus, who replied: “He only does what he should; there would be no point in his living among respectable people if he didn’t learn good manners.” These, according to M. de Charlus, were the old manners of France, untainted by any British stiffness. Thus, when Charlie, returning from a tour in the provinces or abroad, arrived in his traveling suit at the baron’s, the latter, if there were not too many people present, would kiss him without ceremony upon both cheeks, perhaps a little in order to banish by so ostentatious a display of his affection any idea of its being criminal, perhaps because he could not deny himself a pleasure, but still more, doubtless, from a literary sense, as upholding and illustrating the traditional manners of France, and, just as he would have countered the Munich or modern style of furniture by keeping in his rooms old armchairs that had come to him from a great-grandmother, countering the British phlegm with the affection of a warmhearted father of the eighteenth century, unable to conceal his joy at seeing his son once more. Was there indeed a trace of incest in this paternal affection? It is more probable that the way in which M. de Charlus habitually appeased his vice, as to which we will learn something in due course, was not sufficient for the need of affection, which had remained unsatisfied since the death of his wife; the fact remains that after having thought more than once of remarrying, he was now devoured by a maniacal desire to adopt an heir, and certain persons close to him feared that he was going to satisfy this need by adopting Charlie. And there was nothing extraordinary in that. The invert who has been able to feed his passion only on a literature written for women-loving men, who used to think of men when he read Musset’s *Les Nuits*,³⁶⁶ feels the need to partake, nevertheless, in all the social activities of the man who is not an invert, to keep a lover, like the old frequenter of the Opéra keeps ballet dancers, and to settle down, to marry or form a permanent tie with a man, to become a father.

M. de Charlus took Morel aside on the pretext of getting him to explain what was going to be played, but above all finding a great contentment, while Charlie showed him his music, in displaying thus publicly their secret intimacy. In the meantime, I myself felt a certain charm. For although the

little clan included few girls, on the other hand girls were abundantly invited on the big evenings. There were a number present, and very pretty girls too, whom I knew. They wafted smiles of greeting to me across the room. The air was thus decorated at every moment with the charming smile of some girl. That is the manifold, occasional ornament of evening parties, as it is of days. We remember an atmosphere because girls were smiling in it.

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Furthermore, many people might have been greatly surprised had they overheard the furtive remarks that M. de Charlus exchanged with a number of important men at this party. These were two dukes, a distinguished general, a great writer, a great physician, a great lawyer. And the remarks in question were: "By the way, did you notice the footman, I mean the little fellow they take on the carriage? At our cousin Guermantes's, you don't know of anyone?" "At the moment, no." "I say, though, outside the door, where the carriages stop, there used to be a young blond person, in short breeches, who seemed to me most attractive. She³⁶⁷ called my carriage most charmingly, I would gladly have prolonged the conversation." "Yes, but I believe she's altogether hostile, besides, she puts on airs, you like to get to business at once, you would loathe her. Anyhow, I know there's nothing doing, a friend of mine tried." "That is a pity, I thought the profile very fine, and the hair superb." "Really, as much as that? I think, if you had seen a little more of her, you would have been disillusioned. No, in the restaurant, only two months ago you would have seen a real marvel, a great fellow six-foot-six, with perfect skin, and who loves it, too. But he's gone off to Poland." "Ah, that is rather a long way." "You never know, he may come back, perhaps. One always meets again somewhere." There is no great social function that does not, if, in taking a cross-section of it, we contrive to cut sufficiently deep, resemble those parties to which doctors invite their patients, who utter the most intelligent remarks, have perfect manners, and would never show that they were mad did they not whisper in our ear, pointing to some old gentleman who goes past: "That's Joan of Arc."

"I feel that it is our duty to enlighten him," Mme Verdurin said to Brichot. "Not that I have anything against Charlus, far from it. He is a pleasant fellow and as for his reputation, I don't mind saying that it is not of a sort that can do me any harm! As far as I'm concerned, in our little clan, in our table talk, since I detest flirts, the men who talk nonsense to a woman in a corner instead of discussing interesting topics, but with Charlus I've never been afraid of what happened to me with Swann, and Elstir, and lots of others. With him I had no need to worry, he would come to my dinners, all the women in the world might be there, you could be certain that the general conversation would not be disturbed by flirtations and whisperings. Charlus is in a class of his own, one doesn't worry, he might as well be a priest. Only, he must not be allowed to take it upon himself to order about

the young men who come to the house and cause trouble in our little nucleus, or he'll be worse than a man who runs after women." And Mme Verdurin was sincere in thus proclaiming her indulgence toward Charism. Like every ecclesiastical power, she regarded human frailties as less dangerous than anything that might undermine the principle of authority, impair the orthodoxy, modify the ancient creed of her little Church. "If he does, then I will bare my teeth. What do you say to a gentleman who tried to prevent Charlie from coming to a rehearsal because he himself was not invited? So he's going to be taught a lesson, I hope he'll profit by it, otherwise he can simply take his hat and go. He keeps the boy under lock and key, upon my word he does." And, using exactly the same expressions that almost anyone else might have used, for there are certain expressions not in common currency that some particular subject, some given circumstance, recalls almost inevitably to the mind of the speaker, who imagines that he is giving free expression to his thought when he is merely repeating mechanically the universal version, she went on: "It's impossible to see Morel nowadays without that great lout hanging around him, like an armed escort." M. Verdurin offered to take Charlie out of the room for a minute to explain things to him, on the pretext of asking him something. Mme Verdurin was afraid that this might upset him, and that he would play badly in consequence. "It would be better to postpone this performance until after the other. Perhaps even until a later occasion." For however Mme Verdurin might look forward to the delicious emotion that she would feel when she knew that her husband was engaged in enlightening Charlie in the next room, she was afraid, if the shot misfired, that he would lose his temper and would fail to reappear on the sixteenth.

What ruined M. de Charlus that evening was the ill-breeding—so common in their class—of the people whom he had invited and who were now beginning to arrive. Having come there partly out of friendship for M. de Charlus and also out of curiosity to explore these novel surroundings, each duchess made straight for the baron as though it were he who was giving the party and said, within a yard of the Verdurins, who could hear every word: "Show me which is mother Verdurin; do you think I really need speak to her? I do hope, at least, that she won't put my name in the paper tomorrow, nobody would ever speak to me again. What, that woman with the white hair? But she looks quite presentable." Hearing some mention of Mlle Vinteuil, who, however, was not in the room, more than one of them

said: “Ah! The sonata-man’s daughter? Show her to me” and, each finding a number of her friends, they formed a group by themselves, watched, sparkling with ironical curiosity, the arrival of the faithful, able at the most to point a finger at the odd way in which a person had done her hair, who, a few years later, was to make this the fashion in the very best society, and, in short, regretted that they did not find this salon as different from the ones that they knew, as they had hoped to find it, feeling the disappointment of people in society who, having gone to the Bruant’s nightclub³⁶⁸ in the hope that the chansonnier would make a butt of them, find themselves greeted on their arrival with a polite bow instead of the expected: “Ah! voyez c’tte gueule, c’tte binette. Ah! voyez c’tte gueule qu’elle a.”³⁶⁹

M. de Charlus had, at Balbec, given me a perspicacious criticism of Mme de Vaugoubert, who, notwithstanding her great intelligence, had brought about, after his unexpected prosperity, the irremediable disgrace of her husband. The rulers to whose court M. de Vaugoubert was accredited, King Theodosius and Queen Eudoxia,³⁷⁰ having returned to Paris, but this time for a prolonged visit, daily festivities had been held in their honor, in the course of which the queen, on the friendliest terms with Mme de Vaugoubert, whom she had seen for the past ten years in her own capital, and knowing neither the wife of the president of the Republic nor the wives of his ministers, had neglected these ladies and kept entirely aloof with the ambassadress. This lady, believing her own position to be unassailable—M. de Vaugoubert having been responsible for the alliance between King Theodosius and France—had derived from the preference that the queen showed for her society a proud satisfaction but no anxiety at the danger that threatened her, which took shape a few months later in the fact, wrongly considered impossible by the too confident couple, of the brutal retirement from the service of M. de Vaugoubert. M. de Charlus, commenting in the “twister” on the downfall of his lifelong friend, expressed his astonishment that an intelligent woman had not, in such circumstances, brought all her influence with the king and queen to bear, so that it might seem that she herself possessed no influence at all, and to make them transfer to the wives of the president and his ministers a civility by which those ladies would have been all the more flattered, that is to say which would have made them more inclined, in their satisfaction, to be grateful to the Vaugouberts, inasmuch as they would have supposed that civility to be spontaneous, and

not dictated by them. But the man who can see the mistakes of others, if he is slightly intoxicated by circumstances, often succumbs to them himself. And M. de Charlus, while his guests made their way toward him, to come and congratulate him, thank him, as though he were the master of the house, never thought of asking them to say a few words to Mme Verdurin. Only the Queen of Naples,³⁷¹ in whom survived the same noble blood that had flowed in the veins of her sisters the Empress Élisabeth and the Duchesse d'Alençon,³⁷² made a point of talking to Mme Verdurin as though she had come for the pleasure of meeting her rather than for the music and for M. de Charlus, made endless pretty speeches to her hostess, did not cease from telling her for how long she had been wishing to make her acquaintance, expressed her admiration for the house and spoke to her of all manner of subjects as though she were paying a call. She would so much have liked to bring her niece Élisabeth, she said (the niece who shortly afterward was to marry Prince Albert of Belgium),³⁷³ who would be so sorry. She stopped talking when she saw the musicians mount the platform and asked which of them was Morel. She could scarcely have been under any illusion as to the motives that led M. de Charlus to desire that the young virtuoso should be surrounded with so much glory. But the venerable wisdom of a sovereign in whose veins flowed the blood of one of the noblest races in history, one of the richest in experience, skepticism and pride, made her merely regard the inevitable defects of the people whom she loved best, such as her cousin Charlus (whose mother had been, like herself, a Duchess of Bavaria), as misfortunes that rendered more precious to them the support that they might find in herself and, consequently, gave her even more pleasure in providing that support. She knew that M. de Charlus would be doubly touched by her having taken the trouble to come in the circumstances. Only, being as good as she had long ago shown herself brave, this heroic woman who, a soldier-queen, had herself fired her musket from the ramparts of Gaeta,³⁷⁴ always ready to take her place chivalrously by the weaker side, seeing Mme Verdurin alone and abandoned, and moreover unaware that she ought not to leave the queen, had sought to pretend that for her, the Queen of Naples, the center of this party, the main attraction that had made her come was Mme Verdurin. She apologized endlessly for not being able to remain until the end, as she had, although she never went anywhere, to go on to another party, and begged that on no account, when she had to go, should any fuss

be made for her, thus discharging Mme Verdurin of the honors that the latter did not even know that she ought to render her.

One must, however, do M. de Charlus the justice of saying that, if he entirely forgot Mme Verdurin and allowed her to be ignored to a scandalous extent by the people “of his own world” whom he had invited, he did, on the other hand, realize that he must not allow these people to display, during the “musical performance” itself, the bad manners that they were exhibiting toward the Mistress. Morel had already mounted the platform, the musicians were assembling, and one could still hear conversations, not to say laughter, comments such as “it appears, one has to be initiated to understand it.” Immediately, M. de Charlus, drawing himself erect, as though he had entered a different body from that which I had seen, not an hour ago, dragging itself toward Mme Verdurin’s door, assumed a prophetic expression and stared at the assembly with an earnestness that indicated that this was not the time for laughter, whereupon one saw a rapid blush tinge the cheeks of more than one lady thus publicly rebuked, like a schoolgirl scolded by her teacher in front of the whole class. To my mind, M. de Charlus’s attitude, noble as it was, was somehow slightly comic; for at one moment he pulverized his guests with a flaming glare, at another, in order to indicate to them as with a *vade mecum*³⁷⁵ the religious silence that ought to be observed, the detachment from every worldly preoccupation, he himself presented, as he raised to his fine brow his white-gloved hands, a model (to which they must conform) of gravity, already almost of ecstasy, without acknowledging the greetings of latecomers so indelicate as not to understand that it was now the time for High Art. They were all hypnotized; no one dared utter a sound, move a chair; respect for music—by virtue of Palamède’s prestige—had been instantaneously inculcated in a crowd as ill-bred as it was elegant.

When I saw appear on the little platform not only Morel but other instrumentalists as well, I supposed that the program was to begin with works of composers other than Vinteuil. For I imagined that the only work of his in existence was his sonata for piano and violin.

Mme Verdurin sat in a place apart, the twin hemispheres of her pale, slightly roseate brow magnificently curved, her hair drawn back, partly in imitation of an eighteenth-century portrait, partly from the desire for coolness of a fever-stricken patient whom modesty forbids to reveal her condition, aloof, a deity presiding over musical rites, goddess of Wagnerism

and migraines, a sort of almost tragic Norn,³⁷⁶ evoked by the spell of genius in the midst of all these bores, in whose presence she would more than ordinarily scorn to express her feelings upon hearing a piece of music that she knew better than they. The concert began, I did not know what they were playing, I found myself in a strange land. Where was I to locate it? Into what composer's country had I come? I would have been glad to know, and, seeing nobody near me whom I might question, I would have liked to be a character in those *Arabian Nights* that I never tired of reading and in which, in moments of uncertainty, there arose a genie or a maiden of ravishing beauty, invisible to everyone else but not to the bewildered hero to whom she reveals exactly what he wishes to learn. Indeed, at this very moment I was favored with precisely such a magical apparition. As when, in a stretch of country that we don't believe we know, and that as a matter of fact we have approached from a new direction, when after turning out of one road, we find ourself emerging suddenly upon another every inch of which is familiar, only we have not been in the habit of entering it from that end, we say to ourself immediately: "Why, this is the lane that leads to the garden gate of my friends the Xs; I will be there in a minute," and there, indeed, is their daughter at the gate, come out to greet us as we pass; so, all of a sudden, I found myself, in the midst of this music that was new to me, right in the heart of Vinteuil's sonata; and, more marvelous than any maiden, the little phrase, enveloped, harnessed in silver, glittering with brilliant effects of sound, as light and soft as silken scarves, came toward me, recognizable in this new guise. My joy at having found it again was enhanced by the accent, so friendly and familiar, which it adopted in addressing me, so persuasive, so simple, albeit without dimming the shimmering beauty with which it was resplendent. Its intention, however, was, this time, merely to show me the way, which was not the way of the sonata, for this was an unpublished work of Vinteuil in which he had merely amused himself, by an allusion that was explained at this point by a sentence in the program that one ought to have been reading simultaneously, in making the little phrase reappear for a moment. No sooner was it thus recalled than it vanished, and I found myself once more in an unknown world, but I knew now, and everything that followed only confirmed my knowledge, that this world was one of those that I had never even been capable of imagining that Vinteuil could have created, for when, weary of the sonata, which was to me a universe thoroughly explored, I

tried to imagine others equally beautiful but different, I was merely doing what those poets do who fill their artificial Paradise with meadows, flowers, and streams that duplicate those existing already on earth. What was now before me made me feel as keen a joy as the sonata would have given me if I had not already known it, and consequently, while no less beautiful, was different. Whereas the sonata opened upon a dawn of lilled meadows, parting its slender whiteness to suspend itself over the frail and yet consistent mingling of a rustic bower of honeysuckle with white geraniums, it was upon continuous, level surfaces like those of the sea that, in the midst of a stormy morning beneath an already lurid sky, there began, in an eerie silence, in an infinite void, this new work, and it was into a roseate dawn that, in order to construct itself progressively before me, this unknown universe was drawn from silence and from night. This redness, so new, so absent from the tender, rural, pale sonata, tinged all the sky, as dawn does, with a mysterious hope. And a song already pierced the air, a song on seven notes, but the strangest, the most different from any that I had ever imagined, from any that I could ever have been able to imagine, at once ineffable and shrill, no longer the cooing of a dove as in the sonata, but rending the air, as vivid as the scarlet tinge in which the opening bars had been bathed, something like the mystical crow of a cock, an ineffable but overshrill call of the eternal morning.³⁷⁷ The atmosphere, cold, soaked in rain, electric—of a quality so different, with wholly other pressures, in a world so remote from that, virginal and endowed only with vegetable life, of the sonata—changed at every moment, obliterating the crimson promise of the Dawn. At noon, however, beneath a scorching though transitory sun, it seemed to fulfill itself in a heavy, almost rural bliss in which the peal of clanging, racing bells (like those that kindled the blaze of the square outside the church of Combray, and that Vinteuil, who must often have heard them, had perhaps discovered at that moment in his memory like a color that a painter has at hand on his palette) seemed to materialize the coarsest joy. To tell the truth, from the esthetic point of view, this joyous motif did not appeal to me, I found it almost ugly, its rhythm seemed so laboriously earthbound that one might have succeeded in imitating almost everything that was essential to it by merely making noises, by the tapping of drumsticks in a certain way on a table. It seemed to me that Vinteuil had been lacking, here, in inspiration, and consequently I was a little lacking also in the power of attention.

I looked at the Mistress, whose fierce immobility seemed to be protesting against the rhythmic noddings—in time with the music—of the ignorant heads of the ladies of the Faubourg. Mme Verdurin did not say: “You understand that I know something about this music, and more than a little! If I were to express all that I feel, you would never hear the end of it!” She did not say this. But her upright, motionless body, her expressionless eyes, her straying locks said it for her. They spoke also of her courage, said that the musicians might go on, need not spare her nerves, that she would not flinch at the andante, would not cry out at the allegro. I looked at the musicians. The cellist was hunched over the instrument that he clutched between his knees, his head bowed forward, his coarse features assuming an involuntary expression of disgust at the more mannerist moments; another leaned over his double bass, fingering it with the same domestic patience with which he might have plucked a cabbage, while by his side the harpist, a mere girl in a short skirt, framed behind the diagonal rays of her golden quadrilateral like those which, in the magic chamber of a Sibyl,³⁷⁸ arbitrarily denote the ether, according to the traditional forms, seemed to be picking out exquisite sounds here and there at the designated points, just as though, a little allegorical deity, placed in front of the golden trellis of the heavenly vault, she were gathering, one by one, its stars. As for Morel, a lock, hitherto invisible and lost in the rest of his hair, had just fallen loose and formed a curl upon his brow.

I turned my head slightly toward the audience to discover what M. de Charlus might be feeling at the sight of this curl. But my eyes encountered only the face, or rather the hands of Mme Verdurin, for the former was entirely buried in the latter. Did the Mistress, by assuming this contemplative pose, wish to show that she considered herself as in church, and found this music no different from the most sublime of prayers? Did she wish, as do some people in church, to hide from indiscreet eyes, out of modesty, their presumed fervor or their culpable lack of concentration or an irresistible need to sleep? A regular noise that was not musical led me to believe momentarily that this last hypothesis was the correct one, but I quickly realized that the noise was produced by the snores, not of Mme Verdurin, but of her dog.

But very soon, the triumphant motive of the bells having been banished, dispersed by others, I succumbed once again to the music; and I began to realize that if, in the body of this septet, different elements presented

themselves in turn to combine at the close, so also Vinteuil's sonata and, as I later discovered, his other works as well, had been no more than timid essays, exquisite but very slight, toward the triumphant and complete masterpiece that was revealed to me at this moment. And so too, I could not help recalling by comparison how I had thought of the other worlds that Vinteuil might have created as of so many universes as hermetically sealed as each of my own love affairs, whereas in reality I was obliged to admit that in the volume of my latest love—that is to say, my love for Albertine—my first inklings of love for her (at Balbec at the very beginning, then after the game of ferret, then on the night when she slept at the hotel, then in Paris on the foggy Sunday afternoon, then on the night of the Guermantes' party, then at Balbec³⁷⁹ again, and finally in Paris where my life was now closely linked to her own) had been nothing more than experiments; indeed, if I were to consider, not my love for Albertine, but my life as a whole, my earlier love affairs had themselves been but slight and timid essays that were paving the way, appeals that were calling for this vaster love: my love for Albertine. And I ceased to follow the music, in order to ask myself once more whether Albertine had or had not seen Mlle Vinteuil during the last few days, as we interrogate again an internal pain, from which we have been distracted for a moment. For it was in myself that Albertine's possible actions were performed. Of each of the people whom we know we possess a double, but it is generally situated on the horizon of our imagination, of our memory; it remains more or less external to ourselves, and what it has done or may have done has no greater capacity to cause us pain than an object situated at a certain distance, which provides us with only the painless sensations of vision. The things that affect these people we perceive in a contemplative fashion, we are able to deplore them in appropriate language that gives other people a sense of our kindness of heart, we do not feel them. But since the wound inflicted on me at Balbec, it was in my heart, at a great depth, difficult to extract, that Albertine's double was lodged. What I saw of her hurt me, as a sick man would be hurt whose senses were so seriously deranged that the sight of a color would be felt by him internally like an incision in his living flesh. It was fortunate that I had not already yielded to the temptation to break up with Albertine; the boring thought that I would have to see her again presently, when I went home, was a trifling matter compared with the anxiety that I would have felt if the separation had occurred at this moment when I felt a doubt about her before

I had had time to become indifferent to her. At the moment when I pictured her thus waiting for me at home, like a beloved wife who found the time of waiting long and had perhaps fallen asleep for a moment in her room, I was caressed by the passage of a tender phrase, familial and domestic, of the septet. Perhaps—everything is so interwoven and superimposed in our inner life—it had been inspired in Vinteuil by his daughter's sleep—his daughter, the cause today of all my troubles—when it enveloped in its quiet sweetness, on peaceful evenings, the composer's work, this phrase that calmed me so, by the same soft background of silence that brings so much peace to certain of Schumann's reveries, during which, even when "the poet is speaking," one can tell that "the child is asleep."³⁸⁰ Asleep, awake, I would find her again this evening, when I chose to return home, Albertine, my little child. And yet, I said to myself, something more mysterious than Albertine's love seemed to be promised at the outset of this work, in those first cries of dawn. I tried to banish the thought of my mistress, so as to think only of the composer. Indeed, he seemed to be present. One would have said that, incarnate, the composer lived for all time in his music; one could feel the joy with which he was choosing the color of some timbre, blending it with the others. For with other and more profound gifts, Vinteuil combined the one that few composers and indeed few painters have possessed, of using colors not merely so lasting but so personal that, just as time has been powerless to spoil their freshness, so the disciples who imitate the one who discovered them, and even the masters who surpass him, do not dim their originality. The revolution that their apparition has effected does not live to see its results merge unacknowledged in the work of subsequent generations; it is liberated, it breaks out again, and alone, whenever the innovator's works are performed in all time to come. Each note underlined itself in a color that all the rules in the world could not have taught the most learned composers to imitate, with the result that Vinteuil, although he had appeared at his appointed hour and was fixed in his place in the evolution of music, would always leave that place to stand in the forefront, whenever any of his compositions was performed, which would owe its appearance of having blossomed after the works of more recent composers to this apparently paradoxical and indeed deceptive quality, of permanent novelty. A page of symphonic music by Vinteuil, familiar already on the piano, revealed, when one heard it played by an orchestra—like a ray of summer sunlight that the prism of the window decomposes

before it enters a dark dining room—in an unsuspected, myriad-hued treasure, all the jewels of *The Arabian Nights*. But how can one compare that motionless brilliance of light to what was life, perpetual and blissful motion? This Vinteuil, whom I had known so timid and sad, had been capable—when he had to select a timbre and to blend another with it—of audacities, had enjoyed a felicity, in the full sense of the word, as to which the hearing of any of his works left one in no doubt. The joy that such sonorities had brought him,³⁸¹ the increase of strength that it had given him wherewith to discover others, led the listener on also from one discovery to another, or rather it was the creator himself who guided him, deriving, from the colors that he had invented, a wild joy that gave him the strength to discover, to fling himself upon the others that they seemed to evoke, enraptured, quivering, as though from the shock of an electric spark, when the sublime came spontaneously to life at the clang of the brass, panting, drunken, maddened, vertiginous, while he painted his great musical fresco, like Michelangelo strapped to his scaffold and hurling, from his supine position, tumultuous brushstrokes upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.³⁸² Vinteuil had been dead for many years; but in the sound of these instruments that he had loved, it had been given him to prolong, for an unlimited time, a part at least of his life. Of his life as a man solely?³⁸³ If art was indeed but a prolongation of life, was it worthwhile to sacrifice anything to it, was it not as unreal as life itself? The more I listened to this septet, the less I thought it to be so. No doubt the glowing septet differed singularly from the white sonata; the timid question to which the little phrase replied, from the breathless supplication to find the fulfilment of the strange promise that had resounded, so harsh, so supernatural, so brief, setting athrob the still inert crimson of the morning sky above the sea. And yet these so widely different phrases were composed of the same elements, for just as there was a certain universe, perceptible by us in those fragments scattered here and there, in private houses, in public galleries, which were Elstir's universe, the universe that he saw, in which he lived, so too the music of Vinteuil extended, note by note, key by key, the unknown colorings of an inestimable, unsuspected universe, fragmented by the gaps between the different occasions of hearing his work performed; those two so dissimilar questions that commanded the so different movements of the sonata and the septet, the former breaking into short appeals a line

continuous and pure, the latter welding together into an indivisible structure a medley of scattered fragments, were nevertheless, one so calm and timid, almost detached and as though philosophic, the other so anxious, pressing, imploring, were nevertheless the same prayer, poured forth before different risings of inner suns and merely refracted through the different mediums of other thoughts, of artistic researches carried on through the years in which he had tried to create something new. A prayer, a hope that was at heart the same, distinguishable beneath these disguises in the various works of Vinteuil, and on the other hand not to be found elsewhere than in his works. For these phrases historians of music might indeed find affinities, a pedigree in the works of other great composers, but merely for subordinate reasons, from external resemblances, from analogies that were ingeniously discovered by reasoning rather than felt by a direct impression. The impression that these phrases of Vinteuil imparted was different from any other, as though, notwithstanding the conclusions to which science seems to point, the individual did really exist. And it was precisely when he was seeking vigorously to be something new that one recognized beneath the apparent differences the profound similarities and the deliberate resemblances that existed in the body of a work; when Vinteuil repeated once and again a single phrase, diversified it, amused himself by altering its rhythm, by making it reappear in its original form, these deliberate resemblances, the work of the intellect, inevitably superficial, never succeeded in being as striking as those resemblances, concealed, involuntary, that broke out in different colors, between the two separate masterpieces; for then Vinteuil, seeking to do something new, questioned himself, with all the force of his creative effort, reached his own essential nature at those depths, where, whatever the question asked, it is in the same accent, that is to say its own, that it replies. Such an accent, the accent of Vinteuil, is separated from the accents of other composers by a difference far greater than the one that we perceive between the voices of two people, even between the bellowings and calls of two species of animal: by the real difference that exists between the thoughts of those other composers and the eternal investigations of Vinteuil, the question that he put to himself in so many forms, his habitual speculation, but as free from analytical formulas of reasoning as if it were being carried out in the world of the angels, so that we can measure its depth, but without being any more able to translate it into human speech than are disincarnate spirits when, evoked by a medium,

he questions them as to the mysteries of death. And even when I bore in mind the acquired originality that had struck me that afternoon, the kinship that musicologists might discover between composers, it is indeed a unique accent to which rise, and return in spite of themselves those great singers that original composers are, which is a proof of the irreducibly individual existence of the soul. Though Vinteuil might try to make more solemn, more grand, or to make more lively and merry, what he saw reflected in the mind of his audience, yet Vinteuil, in spite of himself, submerged it all beneath a groundswell that makes his song eternal and at once recognizable. This song, different from those of other singers, similar to all his own, where had Vinteuil learned, where had he heard it? Each artist seems thus to be the native of an unknown country, which he himself has forgotten, different from the one from which will emerge, setting sail for the earth, another great artist. It was certain that Vinteuil, in his latest works, seemed to have drawn nearer to that unknown country. The atmosphere was no longer the same as in the sonata, the questioning phrases became more pressing, more anxious, the answers more mysterious; the washed-out air of morning and evening seemed to influence even the strings of the instruments. Morel might be playing marvelously, the sounds that came from his violin seemed to me singularly piercing, almost shrill. This harshness was pleasing, and, as in certain voices, one felt in it a sort of moral quality and intellectual superiority. But this might shock. When his vision of the universe is modified, purified, becomes more adapted to his memory of his inner homeland, it is only natural that this should be expressed in a general alteration of sounds by the musician, as of colors by the painter. Moreover, the more intelligent section of the public is not misled, since people declared later on that Vinteuil's last compositions were the most profound. Now no program, no subject supplied any intellectual basis for judgment. One guessed therefore that it was a question of the transposition of profundity into the realm of sound.

Composers do not actually remember this lost homeland, but each of them remains all his life unconsciously attuned to it; he is delirious with joy when he is singing the airs of his homeland, betrays it at times in his thirst for fame, but then, in seeking fame, turns his back upon it, and it is only when he disdains it that he finds it, and when the composer, whatever the subject that he is treating, utters that singular strain the uniformity of which—for whatever its subject it remains identical with itself—proves the

permanence of the elements that compose his soul. But then is it not true that from those elements—all the real residuum that we are obliged to keep to ourselves, that cannot be transmitted in talk, even by friend to friend, by master to disciple, by lover to mistress, that ineffable something that makes a difference in quality between what each of us has felt and which he is obliged to leave behind at the threshold of the phrases in which he can communicate with others only by limiting himself to external points common to us all and of no interest—art, the art of a Vinteuil like that of an Elstir, makes it appear, rendering externally visible in the colors of the spectrum that intimate composition of those worlds that we call individual persons and that, without art, we would never know? A pair of wings, a different respiratory system, which would enable us to traverse infinite space, would in no way help us, for, if we visited Mars or Venus keeping the same senses, they would clothe in the same aspect as the things of the earth everything that we would be capable of seeing. The only true voyage of discovery, the only Fountain of Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is; and this we can do with an Elstir, with a Vinteuil; with men like these we do really fly from star to star.

The andante had just ended upon a phrase filled with a tenderness to which I had entirely abandoned myself; there followed, before the next movement, a short intermission during which the performers laid down their instruments and the audience exchanged impressions. A duke, in order to show that he knew what he was talking about, declared: “It is a difficult thing to play well.” Other more entertaining people chatted for a moment with me. But what were their words, which like every human and external word, left me so indifferent, compared with the celestial phrase of music with which I had just been engaged? I was truly like an angel who, fallen from the inebriating bliss of paradise, subsides into the most humdrum reality. And, just as certain creatures are the last surviving testimony to a form of life that nature has discarded, I wondered whether music were not the unique example of what might have been—if there had not been the invention of language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas—the means of communication between souls. It is like a possibility that has come to nothing; humanity has developed along other lines, those of spoken and written language. But this return to the unanalyzed was so inebriating,

that on emerging from that paradise, contact with people who were more or less intelligent seemed to me of an extraordinary insignificance. People—I had been able during the music to remember them, to blend them with it; or rather I had blended with the music little more than the memory of one person only, which was Albertine. And the phrase that ended the andante seemed to me so sublime that I said to myself that it was a pity that Albertine did not know and, had she known, would not have understood what an honor it was to be blended with anything so great as this phrase that reunited us, and the pathetic voice of which she seemed to have borrowed. But, once the music was interrupted, the people who were present seemed too dull. Refreshments were handed around. M. de Charlus accosted a footman now and then with: “How are you? Did you get my note? Can you come?” No doubt there was in these remarks the freedom of the grand seigneur who thinks he is flattering his hearer and is himself more one of the people than the bourgeois; there was also the cunning of the culprit who imagines that anything he flaunts is on that account regarded as innocent. And he added, in the Guermantes tone of Mme de Villeparisis: “He’s a fine young fellow, good-natured, I often employ him at home.” But his adroitness turned against the baron, for people thought his intimate conversation and correspondence with footmen extraordinary. The footmen themselves were not so much flattered as embarrassed in the presence of their comrades.

Meanwhile the septet had begun again and was moving toward its close; again and again one phrase or another from the sonata recurred, but altered each time, its rhythm and harmony different, the same and yet something else, as things recur in life; and they were phrases of the sort that, without our being able to understand what affinity the past life of a certain composer assigns to them as their sole and necessary home, are to be found only in his work, and appear constantly in it, where they are the fairies, the dryads,³⁸⁴ the household gods. I had at first distinguished in the septet two or three that reminded me of the sonata. Presently—bathed in the violet mist that rose particularly in Vinteuil’s later work, so much so that, even when he introduced a dance measure, it remained captive in the heart of an opal—I caught the sound of another phrase from the sonata, still hovering so remote that I barely recognized it; hesitating, it approached, vanished as though in alarm, then returned, joined hands with others, that had come, as I learned later on, from other works, summoned yet others that became in

their turn attractive and persuasive, as soon as they were tamed, and took their places in the round, a round divine but permanently invisible to most of the listeners, who, having before their eyes only a thick veil through which they saw nothing, punctuated arbitrarily with admiring exclamations a continuous boredom from which they thought they would die. Then the phrases withdrew, except one that I saw reappear five times or six, without being able to distinguish its features, but so caressing, so different—as no doubt the little phrase from the sonata had been for Swann—from anything that any woman had ever made me desire, that this phrase, which offered me in so sweet a voice a happiness that it would really have been worth the struggle to obtain, is perhaps—this invisible creature whose language I did not know and whom I understood so well—the only Stranger³⁸⁵ that it has ever been my good fortune to meet. Then this phrase broke up, was transformed, like the little phrase in the sonata, and became the mysterious appeal of the start. A phrase of a plaintive kind rose in opposition to it, but so profound, so vague, so internal, almost so organic and visceral that one could not tell at each of its repetitions whether they were those of a theme or of an attack of neuralgia. Presently these two motives were wrestling together in a close fight in which now one disappeared entirely, and now the listener could catch only a fragment of the other. A wrestling match of energies only, to tell the truth; for if these creatures confronted each other, it was rid of their physical bodies, of their appearance, of their names, and finding in me an inward spectator, himself indifferent also to their names and particulars, interested only in their immaterial and dynamic combat and following with passion its sonorous changes. In the end the joyous motif was left triumphant; it was no longer an almost anxious appeal addressed to an empty sky, it was an ineffable joy that seemed to come from paradise, a joy as different from that of the sonata as from a grave and gentle angel by Bellini,³⁸⁶ playing the theorbo, would be some scarlet-robed archangel by Mantegna³⁸⁷ sounding a trumpet. I knew that this new tone of joy, this appeal to a superterrestrial joy, was a thing that I would never forget. But would I ever be able to realize it? This question seemed to me all the more important inasmuch as this phrase was what might have seemed most definitely to characterize—from its sharp contrast with all the rest of my life, with the visible world—those impressions that at remote intervals I experienced in my life as starting points, foundation stones for the

construction of a true life: the impression that I had felt at the sight of the steeples of Martinville, or of a line of trees near Balbec.³⁸⁸ In any case, to return to the particular accent of this phrase, how strange it was that the presentiment most different from what life assigns to us on earth, the boldest approximation to the bliss of the world beyond should have been materialized precisely in the melancholy, respectable little bourgeois whom we used to meet in the Month of Mary³⁸⁹ at Combray! But, stranger still, how did it come about that this revelation, the strangest that I had yet received, of an unknown type of joy, should have come to me from him, since, it was said, when he died he left nothing behind him but his sonata, all the rest being nonexistent in indecipherable scribblings? Indecipherable they may have been, but they had nevertheless been in the end deciphered, by dint of patience, intelligence, and respect, by the only person who had lived sufficiently close to Vinteuil to understand his method of working, to interpret his orchestral indications: Mlle Vinteuil's friend. Even in the lifetime of the great composer, she had acquired from his daughter the veneration that the latter felt for her father. It was because of this veneration that, in those moments in which people run counter to their true inclinations, the two girls had been able to find an insane pleasure in the profanations that have already been narrated.³⁹⁰ Her adoration of her father was the primary condition of his daughter's sacrilege. And no doubt they ought to have forgone the voluptuous pleasure of that sacrilege, but it did not express the whole of their natures. And, moreover, the profanations had become rare until they disappeared altogether, in proportion as their morbid carnal relations, that troubled, smoldering fire, had gradually given place to the flame of a pure and lofty friendship. Mlle Vinteuil's friend was sometimes worried by the importunate thought that she had perhaps hastened the death of Vinteuil. At any rate, by spending years in poring over the cryptic scribblings left by Vinteuil, in establishing the correct reading of those mysterious hieroglyphs, Mlle Vinteuil's friend had the consolation of assuring the composer, over whose final years she had cast a shadow, an immortal and compensating glory. Relations that are not consecrated by the laws establish bonds of kinship as manifold, as complex, even more solid than those that spring from marriage.³⁹¹ Indeed, without pausing to consider relations of so special a nature, do we not find every day that adultery, when it is based upon genuine love, does not upset the family sentiment, the

duties of kinship, but rather revivifies them? Adultery brings the spirit into what marriage would often have left a dead letter. A good daughter who merely for reasons of propriety will wear mourning for her mother's second husband has not tears enough to shed for the man whom her mother has chosen out of all the world as her lover. In any case, Mlle Vinteuil had acted only out of sadism, which did not excuse her, but it gave me a certain consolation to think so later on. She must indeed have realized, I told myself, at the moment when she and her friend profaned her father's photograph, that what they were doing was merely morbidity, silliness, and not the true and joyous wickedness that she would have liked to feel. This idea that it was merely a simulation of wickedness spoiled her pleasure. But if this idea recurred to her mind later on, since it had spoiled her pleasure so it must then have diminished her grief. "It wasn't me," she must have told herself, "I was out of my mind. I myself can still pray for my father's soul, and not to despair of his forgiveness." Only it is possible that this idea, which had certainly occurred to her in her pleasure, may not have occurred to her in her grief. I would have liked to be able to put it into her mind. I am sure that I would have done her good and that I would have been able to reestablish between her and the memory of her father a better rapport.

As in the illegible notebooks in which a chemist of genius, who does not know that death is at hand, jots down discoveries that will perhaps remain forever unknown, Mlle Vinteuil's friend had disentangled, from papers more illegible than strips of papyrus dotted with a cuneiform script, the formula, eternally true, forever fertile, of this unknown joy, the mystic hope of the crimson Angel of the Dawn. And I for whom, although not so much, perhaps, as for Vinteuil, she had also been, had just been once more this very evening, by reawakening my jealousy of Albertine, and was to be above all in the future, the cause of so many sufferings, it was thanks to her, in compensation, that there had reached my ears the strange summons that I would never for a moment cease to hear, as the promise and proof that there existed something other, realizable no doubt through art, than the nullity that I had found in all my pleasures and in love itself, and that if my life seemed to me so futile, at least it had not yet accomplished everything.

What she had enabled us, thanks to her labor, to know of Vinteuil was, to tell the truth, the whole of Vinteuil's work. Compared with this septet, certain phrases from the sonata that alone the public knew appeared so commonplace that one failed to understand how they could have aroused so

much admiration. Similarly we are surprised that for years past, pieces as trivial as the “Evening Star” or “Elisabeth’s Prayer”³⁹² can have aroused in the concert hall fanatical worshipers who wore themselves out in applause and in shouting *encore* at the end of what after all is poor and trite to us who know *Tristan*, the *Rheingold*, and the *Meistersinger*.³⁹³ We are left to suppose that those featureless melodies nevertheless contained already in infinitesimal, and for that reason, perhaps, more easily assimilable quantities, something of the originality of the masterpieces that, in retrospect, are alone of importance to us, but whose very perfection may perhaps have prevented them from being understood; those earlier melodies may have prepared the way for them in our hearts. It is true that, if they gave an indistinct presentiment of the beauties to come, they left the latter in a state of complete obscurity. It was the same with Vinteuil; if at his death he had left behind him—excepting certain parts of the sonata—only what he had been able to complete, what we would have known of him would have been, in relation to his true greatness, as little as, in the case of, say, Victor Hugo, if he had died after the “Pas d’Armes du Roi Jean,”³⁹⁴ the “Fiancée du Timbalier,”³⁹⁵ and “Sara la baigneuse,”³⁹⁶ without having written a line of the *Légende des Siècles* or the *Contemplations*:³⁹⁷ what is to us his real work would have remained purely potential, as unknown as those universes to which our perception does not reach, of which we will never form any idea.

Furthermore, the apparent contrast, that profound union between genius (talent too and even virtue) and the sheath of vices in which, as had happened in the case of Vinteuil, it is so frequently contained, preserved, was legible, as in a popular allegory, in the mere assembly of the guests among whom I found myself once again when the music had come to an end. This assembly, although limited this time to Mme Verdurin’s drawing room, resembled many others, the ingredients of which are unknown to the general public, and which journalist-philosophers, if they are at all well-informed, call Parisian, or Panamist,³⁹⁸ or Dreyfusard, never suspecting that they may equally well be found in Petersburg, Berlin, Madrid, and in every epoch; if as a matter of fact the Undersecretary of State for Fine Arts, an artist to his fingertips, well bred and snobbish, several duchesses, and three ambassadors with their wives were present this evening at Mme Verdurin’s, the proximate, immediate cause of their presence lay in the relations that

existed between M. de Charlus and Morel, relations that made the baron anxious to give as wide a celebrity as possible to the artistic triumphs of his young idol, and to obtain for him the cross of the Légion d'honneur; the remoter cause that had made this assembly possible was that a girl living with Mlle Vinteuil in the same way as the baron was living with Charlie had brought to light a whole series of works of genius that had been such a revelation that before long a subscription was to be opened under the patronage of the minister of education, with the object of erecting a statue of Vinteuil. Moreover, these works had been assisted, no less than by Mlle Vinteuil's relations with her friend, by the baron's relations with Charlie, a sort of crossroad, a short cut, thanks to which the world was enabled to overtake these works without the detour, if not of a want of comprehension that would long persist, at least of a complete ignorance that might have lasted for years. Whenever an event occurs that is within the range of the vulgar mind of the journalist-philosopher, a political event as a rule, the journalist-philosophers are convinced that there has been some great change in France, that we will never see such evenings again, that no one will ever again admire Ibsen,³⁹⁹ Renan,⁴⁰⁰ Dostoyevsky,⁴⁰¹ D'Annunzio,⁴⁰² Tolstoy,⁴⁰³ Wagner, Strauss. For the journalist-philosophers take their text from the equivocal undercurrents of these official manifestations, in order to find something decadent in the art that is there celebrated and that as often as not is more austere than any other. For there is not a name among those most revered by these journalist-philosophers that has not quite naturally given rise to some such strange gathering, although its strangeness may have been less flagrant and better concealed. In the case of this gathering, the impure elements associated with it struck me from another point of view; to be sure, I was as well able as anyone to dissociate them, having learned to know them separately; but those that concerned Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, speaking to me of Combray, spoke to me also of Albertine, that is to say of Balbec, since it was because I had long ago seen Mlle Vinteuil at Montjouvain and had learned of her friend's intimacy with Albertine, that I was presently, when I returned home, to find, instead of solitude, Albertine awaiting me; and those that concerned Morel and M. de Charlus, spoke to me of Balbec, where I had seen, on the platform at Doncières, their intimacy begin,⁴⁰⁴ spoke to me of Combray and of its two "ways," for M. de Charlus was one of those Guermantes, Comtes de

Combray, inhabiting Combray without having any dwelling there, between earth and heaven, like Gilbert the Bad in his stained-glass window, while Morel was the son of that old valet who had introduced me to the lady in pink,⁴⁰⁵ and had enabled me, years after, to identify her as Mme Swann.

“That was beautifully played, huh?” M. Verdurin said to Saniette.

“My only fear,” the latter replied, stuttering, “is that Morel’s very virtuosity obfuscates somewhat the general sentiment of the work.”

“Obfuscate! What do you mean?” screamed M. Verdurin, while a number of the guests gathered around ready, like lions, to devour the man who has been brought down.

“Oh, I’m not taking aim at him alone . . .”

“But he doesn’t even know what he’s talking about. Aiming at what?”

“I . . . would . . . have to hear it . . . one more time in order to form a judgment *à la rigueur*.”

“*À la rigueur!* He is crazy!” said M. Verdurin, holding his head between his hands. “He should be committed.”

“That means ‘with exactitude,’ indeed one sa . . . sa . . . says ‘with rigorous exactitude.’ I’m simply sa . . . sa . . . saying that I can’t judge *à la rigueur*.”

“And I am telling you to leave,” screamed M. Verdurin, intoxicated by his own anger, pointing to the door, his eyes ablaze. “I don’t allow people to talk like that in my house.”

Saniette left, staggering like a drunken man. Some of the guests, seeing him thrown out like that, thought that he had not been invited. And a lady who had been very friendly with him until then, and to whom he had lent a precious book the day before, sent it back to him the next day without a word, poorly wrapped in some paper on which she had had her butler merely put Saniette’s address; she did not want to be “indebted” to anyone who was clearly far from being in the good graces of the little nucleus. Saniette, however, never knew about this rudeness. For scarcely five minutes had passed after M. Verdurin’s outburst when a footman came to inform the Master that Saniette had collapsed from a stroke in the courtyard of the hôtel. But the party was not over. “Have him taken home, he will be all right,” said the Master, whose “hôtel particulier,” as the manager of the hotel at Balbec would have said, was thus assimilated to those grand hotels where one hastens to hide the victims of sudden death in order not to frighten the guests, and where the deceased is temporarily hidden in a food

safe until the moment when, even if he had been in his lifetime the most brilliant and generous of men, he can be clandestinely removed through the door reserved for the dishwashers and sauce chefs. Dead, in fact, Saniette, was not. He lived for a few weeks, but only sporadically regained consciousness.⁴⁰⁶

M. de Charlus repeated, when, the music at an end, his guests came to say goodbye to him, the same error that he had made when they arrived. He did not ask them to shake hands with their hostess, to include her and her husband in the gratitude that was being showered on himself. There was a long procession waiting, but one that led to the baron alone, a fact of which he must have been conscious, for as he said to me a little later: “The form of the artistic celebration ended in a ‘few-words-in-the-sacristy’ touch that was quite amusing.” The guests even prolonged their expressions of gratitude with indiscriminate remarks that enabled them to remain for a moment longer in the baron’s presence, while those who had not yet congratulated him on the success of *his* party waited impatiently in the rear. (More than one husband wanted to leave; but their wives, snobs even though duchesses, protested: “No, no, even if we are kept waiting an hour, we cannot go away without thanking Palamède, who has taken so much trouble. There is nobody else left now who can give entertainments like this.” Nobody would have thought of asking to be introduced to Mme Verdurin any more than to the usher⁴⁰⁷ in a theater to which some great lady has for one evening brought the whole aristocracy.)

“Were you at Éliane de Montmorency’s yesterday, cousin?” asked Mme de Mortemart, seeking an excuse to prolong their conversation.

“Good gracious, no; I like Éliane, but I never can understand her invitations. I must be very stupid, I’m afraid,” he went on, parting his lips in a broad smile, while Mme de Mortemart realized that she was to be made the first recipient of “one of Palamède’s” as she had often been of “one of Oriane’s.”

“I did indeed receive a card two weeks ago from the charming Éliane. Above the questionably authentic name of ‘Montmorency’⁴⁰⁸ was the following kind invitation: ‘My dear cousin, will you do me the honor of thinking of me next Friday at half-past nine.’ Beneath were written two less gratifying words: ‘*Czech Quartet.*’⁴⁰⁹ These seemed to me unintelligible, and in any case to have no more connection with the sentence above than

the words ‘My dear—,’ which you find on the back of a letter, with nothing else after them, when the writer has already begun again on the other side, and has not taken a fresh sheet, either from carelessness or in order to save paper. I am fond of Éliane, and so I wasn’t annoyed, I merely ignored the strange and inappropriate allusion to a Czech Quartet, and, as I am a methodical man, I placed on my mantle the invitation to think of Madame de Montmorency on Friday at half-past nine. Although renowned for my obedient, punctual, and meek nature, as Buffon⁴¹⁰ says of the camel”—at this, laughter seemed to radiate from M. de Charlus who knew that on the contrary he was regarded as the most impossible person to live with—“I was a few minutes late (it took me a few minutes to change my clothes), and without any undue remorse, thinking that half-past nine meant ten. And at the stroke of ten in a comfortable dressing gown, with warm slippers on my feet, I sat down by the fireplace to think of Éliane as she had asked me and with an intensity that began to decrease only at half-past ten. Tell her, please, that I complied strictly with her audacious request. I am sure she will be gratified.”

Mme de Mortemart was helpless with laughter, in which M. de Charlus joined. “And tomorrow,” she went on, forgetting that she had already long exceeded the time that might be allotted to her, “are you going to our La Rochefoucauld cousins?”

“Oh, that, now, is quite impossible, they have invited me, and you too, I see, to a thing it is utterly impossible to imagine and to do, which is called, if I am to believe their card of invitation, a ‘thé dansant.’⁴¹¹ I used to be considered pretty nimble when I was young, but I doubt whether I could ever decently have drunk a cup of tea while I was dancing. No, I have never cared for eating or drinking in an improper way. You will remind me that my dancing days are done. But even sitting down comfortably to drink my tea—of the quality of which I am suspicious since it is called ‘dancing’—I would be afraid that other guests younger than myself, and less nimble possibly than I was at their age, might spill their cups over my tails, which would interfere with my pleasure in draining my own.”

Nor indeed was M. de Charlus content with leaving Mme Verdurin out of the conversation while he spoke of all manner of subjects (which he seemed to be taking pleasure in developing and varying, the cruel pleasure that he had always enjoyed of keeping indefinitely on their feet the friends who were “standing in line” with an excruciating patience for their turn to

come). He even criticized all that part of the evening for which Mme Verdurin was responsible. "But, speaking of cups, what in the world are those strange little bowls that remind me of the vessels in which, when I was a young man, people used to get sorbets from Poiré-Blanche? Somebody said to me just now that they were for 'iced coffee.' But regarding iced coffee, I have seen neither coffee nor ice. What curious little objects, whose purpose is so ill-defined." While saying this M. de Charlus had placed his white-gloved hands vertically over his lips and had prudently circumscribed his indicative stare as though he were afraid of being heard, or even seen by his host and hostess. But this was a mere feint, for in a few minutes he would be offering the same criticisms to the Mistress herself, and a little later would be insolently enjoining: "No more iced-coffee cups, remember! Give them to one of your friends whose house you wish to disfigure. But warn her not to have them in the drawing room, or people might think that they had come into the wrong room, the things are so exactly like chamber pots."

"But, cousin," said the guest, lowering her own voice also and casting a questioning glance at M. de Charlus, for she was afraid of offending not Mme Verdurin but him, "perhaps she doesn't quite know yet . . ."

"She will be taught."

"Oh!" laughed the guest, "she couldn't have a better teacher! She is lucky! If you are in charge, one can be sure there won't be a false note."

"There wasn't one, if it comes to that, in the music."

"Oh! It was sublime. One of those pleasures that can never be forgotten. Speaking of that marvelous violinist," she went on, imagining in her innocence that M. de Charlus was interested in the violin for its own sake, "do you happen to know one whom I heard the other day playing too wonderfully a sonata by Fauré, his name is Frank . . ."

"Yes, he's a horror," replied M. de Charlus, overlooking the rudeness of a contradiction that implied that his cousin was lacking in taste. "As far as violinists are concerned, I advise you to confine yourself to mine."

This paved the way to a new exchange of glances, at once furtive and watchful,⁴¹² between M. de Charlus and his cousin, for, blushing and seeking by her zeal to repair her blunder, Mme de Mortemart went on to suggest to M. de Charlus that she might give a party to hear Morel play. Now, so far as she was concerned, the object of the party was not to bring an unknown talent into prominence, an object that she would, however,

pretend to have in mind, and which was indeed that of M. de Charlus. She regarded it simply as an opportunity for giving a particularly elegant party and was calculating already whom she would invite and whom she would reject. This business of selection, the chief preoccupation of people who give parties (even the people whom “society” journalists are so impudent or so foolish as to call “the élite”), alters at once the expression—and the handwriting—of a hostess more profoundly than any hypnotic suggestion. Before she had even thought of what Morel was to play (which she regarded, and rightly, as a secondary consideration, for even if everybody this evening, from fear of M. de Charlus, had observed a polite silence during the music, it would never have occurred to anyone to listen to it), Mme de Mortemart, having decided that Mme de Valcourt was not to be one of the “elect,” had automatically assumed that air of conspiracy, of a secret plotting which so degrades even those society women who can most easily afford to ignore what “people will say.”

“Would it be possible for me to give a party for people to hear your friend play?” murmured Mme de Mortemart, who, while addressing herself exclusively to M. de Charlus, could not refrain, as though entranced, from casting a glance at Mme de Valcourt (the rejected) in order to make certain that the other was sufficiently far away not to hear her. “No, she cannot possibly hear what I am saying,” Mme de Mortemart concluded inwardly, reassured by her own glance, which as a matter of fact had had a totally different effect upon Mme de Valcourt from that intended: “Why,” Mme de Valcourt had said to herself when she caught this glance, “Marie-Thérèse is planning something with Palamède which I am not to be told.”

“You mean my protégé,” M. de Charlus corrected, as merciless to his cousin’s choice of words as he was to her musical endowments. Then without paying the slightest attention to her silent prayers, as she made a smiling apology: “Why, yes . . .” he said in a loud voice, audible throughout the room, “although there is always a risk in that sort of exportation of a fascinating personality into surroundings that must inevitably diminish his transcendent gifts and would in any case have to be adapted to them.”

Madame de Mortemart told herself that the *mezza voce*, the *pianissimo* of her question had been a waste of trouble, after the megaphone through which the answer had issued. She was mistaken. Mme de Valcourt heard nothing, for the simple reason that she did not understand a single word. Her anxiety diminished and would rapidly have been extinguished had not

Mme de Mortemart, afraid that she might have been given away and afraid of having to invite Mme de Valcourt, with whom she was on too intimate terms to be able to leave her out if the other knew about her party beforehand, raised her eyelids once again in Édith's direction, as though not to lose sight of a threatening peril, lowering them again briskly so as not to commit herself too soon. She intended, on the morning after the party, to write her one of those letters, the complement of the revealing glance, letters that people suppose to be subtle and that are tantamount to a full and signed confession. For instance: "*Dear Édith, I have been missing you. I did not really expect you last night*" ("How could she have expected me," Édith would ask herself, "since she never invited me?") "*as I know that you are not very fond of parties of that sort, which rather bore you. We would have been greatly honored, all the same, by your company*" (never did Mme de Mortemart employ the word "honored," except in the letters in which she attempted to cloak a lie in the semblance of truth). "*You know that you are always at home in our house. However, you were quite right, as it was a complete failure, like everything that is got up at a moment's notice, etc.*" But already the second furtive glance darted at her had enabled Édith to grasp everything that was concealed by the complicated language of M. de Charlus. This glance was indeed so powerful that, after it had struck Mme de Valcourt, the obvious secrecy and mischievous intention that it embodied rebounded upon a young Peruvian whom Mme de Mortemart intended, on the contrary, to invite. But being of a suspicious nature, seeing all too plainly the mystery that was being made without realizing that it was not intended to mystify him, he at once conceived a violent hatred of Mme de Mortemart and determined to play all sorts of spiteful tricks on her, such as ordering fifty iced coffees to be sent to her house on a day when she was not giving a party, or, when she was, inserting a notice in the newspapers announcing that the party was postponed, and publishing false accounts of her subsequent parties, in which would figure the notorious names of all the people whom, for various reasons, a hostess does not invite or even allow to be introduced to her.

Mme de Mortemart need not have bothered herself about Mme de Valcourt. M. de Charlus was about to spoil the projected party far more effectively than the other's presence would have done. "But, my dear cousin," she said in response to the expression "adapting the surroundings," the meaning of which her momentary state of hyperesthesia had enabled her

to discern, “we will save you all the trouble. I will ask Gilbert to arrange everything.”

“Not on any account, all the more as he must not be invited to it. Nothing can be arranged except by myself. The first thing is to exclude all the people who have ears and hear not.”⁴¹³ M. de Charlus’s cousin, who had been reckoning upon Morel as an attraction in order to give a party at which she could say that, unlike so many of her kinswomen, she had “had Palamède,” abruptly shifted her thoughts from this prestige of M. de Charlus, to all sorts of people with whom he would get her into trouble if he began inviting and excluding. The thought that the Prince de Guermantes (on whose account, partly, she was anxious to exclude Mme de Valcourt, whom he declined to meet) was not to be invited, alarmed her. Her eyes assumed an uneasy expression.

“Is the light, which is rather too strong, hurting you?” inquired M. de Charlus with an apparent seriousness the underlying irony of which she failed to perceive.

“No, not at all, I was thinking of the difficulty, not for myself of course, but for my family, if Gilbert were to hear that I had given a party without inviting him, when he never has a cat on his housetop without . . .”⁴¹⁴

“But precisely, we must begin by eliminating the cats, which could only meow; I suppose that the din of talk has prevented you from realizing that it was a question not of doing the civilities of a hostess but of proceeding to the rites customary at every true celebration.” Then, deciding, not that the next person had been kept waiting too long, but that it did not do to exaggerate the favors shown to one who had in mind not so much Morel as her own visiting list, M. de Charlus, like a physician who cuts short a consultation when he considers that it has lasted long enough, gave his cousin a signal to withdraw, not by bidding her goodnight but by turning to the person immediately behind her.

“Bonsoir, Madame de Montesquiou,⁴¹⁵ marvelous, wasn’t it? I have not seen Hélène, tell her that every general abstention, even the most noble, that is to say her own, must include exceptions, if they are dazzling, as has been the case tonight. To show that one is rare is all very well, but to subordinate one’s rarity, which is only negative, to what is precious is better still. In your sister’s case, and I value more than anyone her systematic *absence* from places where what is in store for her is not worthy of her, here tonight,

on the contrary, her presence at so memorable an exhibition as this would have been a precedence, and would have given your sister, already so prestigious, an additional prestige.” Then he turned to a third person.

I was greatly astonished to see in this room, as friendly and flattering toward M. de Charlus as he was curt with him in the past, insisting upon Morel’s being introduced to him and telling him that he hoped he would come and see him, M. d’Argencourt, that terrible scourge of the species of men such as M. de Charlus.⁴¹⁶ At the moment he was living in the thick of them. It was certainly not because he had in any sense become one of them himself. But for some time past he had practically deserted his wife for a young society woman whom he adored. Being intelligent herself, she made him share her taste for intelligent people, and was most eager to have M. de Charlus in her house. But, above all, M. d’Argencourt, extremely jealous and somewhat impotent, feeling that he was failing to satisfy his conquest and anxious at once to hold on to her and to keep her amused, could do so without risk to himself only by surrounding her with innocuous men, whom he thus cast for the part of guardians of his seraglio. These men found that he had become quite pleasant and declared that he was a great deal more intelligent than they had supposed, a discovery that delighted him and his mistress.

The remainder of M. de Charlus’s guests drifted away fairly rapidly. Several of them said: “I don’t want to call at the sacristy” (the little room in which the baron, with Charlie by his side, was receiving congratulations, and to which he himself had given the name), “but I must let Palamède see me so that he will know that I stayed to the end.” Nobody paid the slightest attention to Mme Verdurin. Some pretended not to know who she was and said goodnight by mistake to Mme Cottard, appealing to me for confirmation with a “That is Mme Verdurin, isn’t it?” Mme d’Arpajon asked me, in the hearing of our hostess: “Tell me, has there ever been a Monsieur Verdurin?” The duchesses who still lingered, finding none of the oddities that they expected in this place that they had hoped to find more different from anything that they already knew, made the best of a bad job by going into fits of laughter in front of Elstir’s paintings; for all the rest of the entertainment, which they found more in keeping than they had expected with the style with which they were familiar, they gave the credit to M. de Charlus, saying: “How clever Palamède is at arranging things; if he were to stage an opera in a shed or a bathroom, it would still be perfectly

charming.” The most noble ladies were those who showed most fervor in congratulating M. de Charlus upon the success of a party of the secret motive of which some of them were by no means unaware, without, however, being embarrassed by the knowledge, this class of society—remembering perhaps certain epochs in history when their own family had already arrived at an identical stage of brazenly conscious effrontery—carrying their contempt for scruples almost as far as their respect for etiquette. Several of them engaged Charlie on the spot for different evenings on which he was to come and play them Vinteuil’s septet, but it never occurred to any of them to invite Mme Verdurin. The latter was already blind with fury when M. de Charlus who, his head in the clouds, was incapable of perceiving her condition, decided that it would be only fitting to invite the Mistress to share his joy. And it was perhaps yielding to his taste for literature rather than to an overflow of pride that this specialist in artistic entertainments said to Mme Verdurin: “Well, are you satisfied? I think you have reason to be; you see that when I set to work to give a party there are no half-measures. I do not know whether your heraldic knowledge enables you to gauge the precise importance of the display, the weight that I have lifted, the volume of air that I have displaced for you. You have had the Queen of Naples, the brother of the King of Bavaria, the three premier peers. If Vinteuil is Mahomet, we may say that we have brought to him some of the least movable of mountains. Bear in mind that to attend your party the Queen of Naples has come from Neuilly, which is a great deal more difficult for her than leaving the Two Sicilies,” he went on, with a malicious intent, notwithstanding his admiration for the queen. “It is a historic event. Just think that it is perhaps the first time she has gone anywhere since the fall of Gaeta. It is probable that the dictionaries will record as climatic dates the day of the fall of Gaeta and that of the Verdurins’ party. The fan that she laid down the better to applaud Vinteuil deserves to become more famous than the fan that Mme de Metternich broke because the audience hissed Wagner.”⁴¹⁷

“Indeed, she left it here,” said Mme Verdurin, momentarily appeased by the memory of the queen’s kindness to her, and she showed M. de Charlus the fan, which was lying upon a chair.

“Oh! How moving!” exclaimed M. de Charlus, approaching the relic with veneration. “It is all the more touching for being so hideous; the little violet is incredible!” And spasms of emotion and irony coursed through him

alternately. "Oh dear, I don't know whether you feel this sort of thing as I do. Swann would positively have died of convulsions if he had seen it. I am sure, however high the price it brings, that I will buy that fan at the sale of the queen's belongings. For she is bound for the auction block; she hasn't a penny," he went on, for he never ceased to intersperse the cruelest slanders with the most sincere veneration, albeit these sprang from two opposing natures, which, however, were combined in him.

They might even be brought to bear alternately upon the same fact. For M. de Charlus, who in his comfortable state as a rich man ridiculed the poverty of the queen, was himself often to be heard extolling that poverty and, when anyone spoke of Princesse Murat, Queen of the Two Sicilies,⁴¹⁸ would reply: "I do not know to whom you are alluding. There is only one Queen of Naples, who is a sublime person and does not keep a carriage. But from her omnibus she annihilates every carriage on the street, and one could kneel down in the dust on seeing her drive past."

"I will bequeath it to a museum. In the meantime, it must be sent back to her, so that she need not hire a fiacre to come and fetch it. The wisest thing, in view of the historical interest of such an object, would be to steal the fan. But that would be awkward for her—since it is probable that she does not possess another!" he added with a shout of laughter. "Anyhow, you see that for my sake she came. And that is not the only miracle that I have performed. I do not believe that anyone at the present day has the power to move the people whom I have brought here. However, everyone must be given his due. Charlie and the rest of the musicians played divinely. And, my dear Mistress," he added condescendingly, "you yourself have played your part on this occasion. Your name will not be unrecorded. History has preserved that of the page who armed Joan of Arc when she set out for battle; in sum, you have served as a connecting link, you have made possible the fusion between Vinteuil's music and its inspired interpreter, you have had the intelligence to appreciate the capital importance of the whole chain of circumstances that would enable the interpreter to benefit by the whole weight of a considerable—if I were not referring to myself, I would say providential—personage, whom you were clever enough to ask to ensure the success of the gathering, to bring before Morel's violin the ears directly attached to the tongues that have the widest hearing; no, no, it is not a small matter. There can be no small matter in so complete a realization. Everything has its part. The Duras was marvelous. In fact,

everything; that is why," he concluded, for he loved to administer a rebuke, "I am opposed to your inviting those divisors who, among the preponderant people whom I brought you would have played the part of the decimal points in a sum, reducing the others to a merely fractional value. I have a very exact appreciation of that sort of thing. You understand, we must avoid gaffes when we are giving a party that ought to be worthy of Vinteuil, of his inspired interpreter, of yourself, and, I venture to say, of me. You were prepared to invite the Molé, and everything would have been spoiled. It would have been the little contrary, neutralizing drop that deprives a potion of its strength. The electric lights would have fused, the petits fours would not have come in time, the orangeade would have given everybody a stomachache. She was the one person not to invite. At the mere sound of her name, as in a fairy tale, not a note would have issued from the brass; the flute and the oboe would have been stricken with a sudden silence. Morel himself, even if he had succeeded in playing a few bars, would not have been in tune, and instead of Vinteuil's septet you would have had a parody of it by Beckmesser,⁴¹⁹ ending amid catcalls. I, who believe strongly in the influence of an individual, could feel quite plainly in the blossoming of a certain largo, which opened itself fully like a flower, in the supreme satisfaction of the finale, which was not merely allegro but incomparably *allègre*,⁴²⁰ that the absence of the Molé was inspiring the musicians and diffusing joy among the very instruments themselves. In any case, when one is at home to queens one does not invite one's concierge." In calling her "the Molé" (as for that matter he said quite affectionately "the Duras") M. de Charlus was doing the lady justice. For all these women were the actresses of society and it is true also that, even regarding her from this point of view, Comtesse Molé did not justify the extraordinary reputation for intelligence that she had acquired, which made one think of those mediocre actors or novelists who, at certain periods, are hailed as men of genius, either because of the mediocrity of their competitors, among whom there is no superior artist capable of showing what is meant by true talent, or because of the mediocrity of the public, which, did there exist an extraordinary individuality, would be incapable of understanding it. In Mme Molé's case it is preferable, if not entirely accurate, to stop at the former explanation. The social world being the realm of nullity, there exist between the merits of different society women only insignificant degrees, which are at best capable of rousing to madness the rancors or the imagination of M.

de Charlus. And certainly, if he spoke as he had just been speaking, in this language that was a precious alloy of artistic and social elements, it was because his old-womanly anger and his culture as a man of the world furnished the genuine eloquence that he possessed with none but insignificant themes. Since the world of differences does not exist on the surface of the earth, among all the countries that our perception renders uniform, all the more reason why it should not exist in the social “world.” Does it exist anywhere else? Vinteuil’s septet had seemed to tell me that it did. But where?

As M. de Charlus also enjoyed repeating what one person had said of another, seeking to stir up quarrels, to divide and reign, he added: “You have, by not inviting her, deprived Mme Molé of the opportunity of saying: ‘I can’t think why this Mme Verdurin should invite me. I can’t imagine who these people are, I don’t know them.’ She was saying a year ago that you were boring her with your advances. She’s a fool, never invite her again. After all, she’s nothing so very wonderful. She can come to your house without making a fuss about it, seeing that I come here. In short,” he concluded, “it seems to me that you have every reason to thank me, for, so far as it went, everything was perfect. The Duchesse de Guermantes did not come, but one can’t tell, it was better perhaps that she didn’t. We won’t bear her any grudge, and we will remember her all the same another time, not that one can help remembering her, her very eyes say to us ‘Forget me not!,’ for they are a pair of myosotis”⁴²¹ (here I thought to myself, how strong the Guermantes spirit—the decision to go to one house and not to another—must be, to have outweighed in the duchess’s mind her fear of Palamède). “In the face of so complete a success, one is tempted like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre⁴²² to see everywhere the hand of Providence. The Duchesse de Duras was enchanted. She even asked me to tell you so,” added M. de Charlus, dwelling upon the words as though Mme Verdurin must regard this as a sufficient honor. Sufficient and indeed barely credible, for he found it necessary, if he was to be believed, to add, “Most certainly,” completely carried away by the madness of those whom Jupiter⁴²³ has decided to ruin: “She has engaged Morel to come to her house, where the same program will be repeated, and I even think of asking her for an invitation for M. Verdurin.” This civility to the husband alone was, although no such idea even occurred to M. de Charlus, the most wounding insult to

the wife who, believing herself to possess, with regard to the violinist, by virtue of a sort of ukase⁴²⁴ that prevailed in the little clan, the right to forbid him to perform elsewhere without her express authorization, was fully determined to forbid his appearance at Mme de Duras's party.

The baron's volubility was in itself an irritation to Mme Verdurin, who did not like people to form independent groups within their little clan. How often, even at La Raspelière, hearing M. de Charlus talking incessantly to Charlie instead of being content with taking his part in the so harmonious chorus of the clan, she had pointed to him and exclaimed: "What a blowhard⁴²⁵ he is! What a blowhard! Oh, if it comes to blowhards, he's a monstrous blowhard!" But this time it was far worse. Intoxicated by the sound of his own voice, M. de Charlus failed to realize that by limiting Mme Verdurin's role and confining it within narrow limits, he was unleashing that feeling of hatred that was in her only a special, social form of jealousy. Mme Verdurin was genuinely fond of her regular visitors, the faithful of the little clan, but wished them to be entirely devoted to their Mistress. Willing to make some sacrifice, like those jealous lovers who will tolerate a betrayal, but only under their own roof and even before their eyes, that is to say when there is no betrayal, she would allow the men to have mistresses, lovers,⁴²⁶ on condition that the affair had no social consequence outside her own house, that the tie was formed and perpetuated in the shelter of her Wednesdays. In the old days, every furtive peal of laughter that came from Odette when she conversed with Swann had gnawed her heartstrings, and so of late had every aside exchanged by Morel and the baron; she found one consolation alone for her griefs, which was to destroy the happiness of others. She could not endure the baron's for long. And here was this rash person precipitating the catastrophe by appearing to be restricting the Mistress's place in her own little clan. Already she could see Morel going into society, without her, under the baron's aegis. There was only one remedy, to make Morel choose between the baron and herself, and, taking advantage of the ascendancy that she had acquired over Morel by proving to him her extraordinary perspicacity, thanks to reports that she had collected, to falsehoods that she invented, all of which served to corroborate what he himself was inclined to believe, and what would in time be made plain to him, thanks to the pitfalls that she was preparing, into which her unsuspecting victims would fall, taking advantage of this ascendancy, to

make him choose herself in preference to the baron. As for the society ladies who had been present and had not even asked to be introduced to her, as soon as she grasped their hesitations or indifference, she had said: "Ah! I see what they are, the sort of old tarts who are unfit for us, it's the last time they will set foot in this house." For she would have died rather than admit that anyone had been less friendly to her than she had hoped.

"Ah! My dear Général," M. de Charlus suddenly exclaimed, abandoning Mme Verdurin, as he caught sight of Général Deltour, Secretary to the Presidency of the Republic, who might be of great value in securing Charlie his medal, and who, after asking some question of Cottard, was rapidly withdrawing: "Good evening, my dear, delightful friend. So this is how you slip away without saying goodbye to me," said the baron with a genial, self-satisfied smile, for he knew quite well that people were always glad to stay behind for a moment to talk to him. And as, in his present state of excitement, he would ask and answer his own questions in a shrill tone: "Well, did you enjoy it? Wasn't it really beautiful? The andante, yes? It's the most touching thing that was ever written. I defy anyone to listen to the end without tears in his eyes. Charming of you to have come. Listen, I had the most perfect telegram this morning from Froberville, who tells me that as far as the Grand Chancery goes the difficulties have been smoothed over, as the saying is." M. de Charlus's voice continued to soar at this piercing pitch, as different from his normal voice as is that of a lawyer making an emphatic plea from his ordinary utterance, a phenomenon of vocal amplification through overexcitement and nervous euphoria analogous to that which, at her own dinner parties, raised to so high a pitch the voice and gaze alike of Mme de Guermantes.

"I intended to send you a note tomorrow by a messenger to tell you of my enthusiasm, until I could find an opportunity of speaking to you, but you have been so surrounded! Froberville's support is not to be disdained, but for my own part, I have the minister's promise," said the general.

"Ah! Excellent. Besides, you have seen for yourself that it is only what such talent deserves. Hoyos⁴²⁷ was delighted, I didn't manage to see the ambassadress; was she pleased? Who would not have been, except those that have ears and hear not, which does not matter so long as they have tongues and can speak."

Taking advantage of the baron's having withdrawn to speak to the general, Mme Verdurin made a signal to Brichot. The latter, not knowing

what Mme Verdurin was going to say, sought to amuse her, and never suspecting the anguish that he was causing me, said to the Mistress: "The baron is delighted that Mlle Vinteuil and her friend did not come. They shock him terribly. He declares that their morals are appalling. You can't imagine how prudish and severe the baron is on moral questions." Contrary to Brichot's expectation, Mme Verdurin was not amused: "He is obscene," was her answer. "Ask him to come smoke a cigarette with you, so that my husband can get hold of his Dulcinea⁴²⁸ without his noticing it and warn him of the abyss that is yawning at his feet."

Brichot seemed to hesitate.

"I don't mind telling you," Mme Verdurin went on, to remove Brichot's final scruples, "that I do not feel at all safe with a man like that in the house. I know, there are all sorts of nasty stories about him, and the police have their eye on him." And, as she possessed a certain talent of improvisation when inspired by malice, Mme Verdurin did not stop at this: "It seems he has been in prison. Yes, yes, I have been told by people who knew all about it. I know, too, from a person who lives in his street, that you can't imagine the ruffians he brings to his house." And as Brichot, who often went to the baron's, began to protest, Mme Verdurin, growing animated, exclaimed: "But I can assure you! You can take my word for it," an expression with which she habitually sought to give weight to an assertion flung out more or less at random. "He will be found murdered in his bed one of these days, as those people always are. It may not quite come to that, perhaps, because he is in the clutches of that Jupien whom he had the impudence to send to me, and who is an ex-convict, I know it, yes, for certain. He has a hold on him because of some letters that are perfectly appalling, it seems. I know it from somebody who has seen them and told me: 'You would be sick on the spot if you saw them.' That is how Jupien makes him toe the line and makes him cough up all the money he wants out of him. I would sooner die a thousand times over than live in a state of terror like Charlus. In any case, if Morel's family decides to press charges against him, I have no desire to be dragged in as an accomplice. If he goes on, it will be at his own risk, but I will have done my duty. What is one to do? It's no joke, I can tell you." And, agreeably whipped into a frenzy already by the thought of her husband's impending conversation with the violinist, Mme Verdurin said to me: "Ask Brichot whether I am not a courageous friend, and whether I am not capable of sacrificing myself to save my comrades." (She was alluding to the

circumstances in which she had, just in time, made him break up, first of all with his laundress and then with Mme de Cambremer,⁴²⁹ as a result of which Brichot had become almost completely blind, and, people said, a morphine addict.) “An incomparable friend, perspicacious and valiant,” replied the professor with a naïve intensity.

“Mme Verdurin prevented me from doing something extremely foolish,” Brichot told me when she had left us. “She never hesitates to operate without anesthesia. She is an interventionist, as our friend Cottard says. I admit, however, that the thought that the poor baron is still unaware of the blow that is going to fall upon him distresses me deeply. He is quite mad about that boy. If Mme Verdurin should prove successful, here’s a man who is going to be very miserable. However, I’m not at all sure that she won’t fail. I am afraid that she may only succeed in sowing discord between them, which, in the end, without parting them, will only make them break with her.”

It was often thus with Mme Verdurin and her faithful. But it was evident that in her the need to preserve their friendship was more and more dominated by the requirement that this friendship should never be challenged by the friendship they might feel for one another. Homosexuality did not disgust her so long as it did not tamper with orthodoxy, but like the Church she preferred any sacrifice rather than a concession of orthodoxy. I was beginning to be afraid lest her irritation with me might be due to her having heard that I had prevented Albertine from going to her that afternoon, and that she might presently set to work, if she had not already begun, upon the same task of separating her from me that her husband, in the case of Charlus, was now going to attempt with the musician.

“Come along, get hold of Charlus, find some excuse, there’s no time to lose,” said Mme Verdurin, “and whatever you do, don’t let him come back here until I send for you. Oh! What an evening,” Mme Verdurin went on, revealing thus the true cause of her rage. “Performing a masterpiece in front of those imbeciles! I don’t include the Queen of Naples, she is intelligent, she is a nice woman” (which meant: “She was nice to me”). “But the others. Oh! It’s enough to drive anyone mad. What can you expect, I’m no longer a girl. When I was young, people told me that one must put up with boredom, I made an effort, but now, oh no, it’s too much for me, I am old enough to do as I please, life is too short; suffer boredom, listen to idiots, smile,

pretend to think them intelligent. No, I can't do it. Get along, Brichot, there's no time to lose."

"I am going, Madame, I am going," said Brichot, as Général Deltour moved away. But first of all the professor took me aside for a moment: "Moral Duty," he said, "is less clearly imperative than our Ethics teach us. Whatever the Theosophical⁴³⁰ cafés and the Kantian beer cellars may say, we are deplorably ignorant of the nature of Good. I myself who, without wishing to boast, have lectured to my pupils, in all innocence, upon the philosophy of the said Immanuel Kant,⁴³¹ I can see no precise ruling for the case of social casuistry with which I am now confronted in that *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which the great unfrocked priest of Protestantism Platonized in the German manner for a Germany prehistorically sentimental and aulic, ringing all the changes of a Pomeranian mysticism.⁴³² It is still *The Symposium*,⁴³³ but held this time at Königsberg, in the local style, indigestible and reeking of sauerkraut, and without gigolos. It is obvious on the one hand that I cannot refuse our excellent hostess the small service that she asks of me, in a fully orthodox conformity with traditional Morality. One must avoid, above all else—for there are few things that engender more inanities than that one—letting oneself be duped by words. But after all, let us not hesitate to admit that if mothers were entitled to vote, the baron would run the risk of being lamentably blackballed for the Chair of Virtue. It is unfortunate that he pursues the vocation of a pedagogue with the temperament of a rake; note that I am not speaking ill of the baron; that good man, who can carve a joint like nobody in the world, combines with a genius for anathema a wealth of kindness. He can be most amusing as a superior sort of clown, whereas with a certain one of my colleagues, an Academician, if you please, I am bored, as Xenophon would say, at a hundred drachmas to the hour.⁴³⁴ But I am afraid that he is expending upon Morel rather more than a wholesome morality enjoins, and without knowing to what extent the young penitent shows himself docile or rebellious to the special exercises that his catechist imposes upon him by way of mortification, one need not be an expert to be aware that we would be erring, as one says, on the side of mansuetude with regard to this Rosicrucian⁴³⁵ who seems to have come down to us from Petronius,⁴³⁶ by way of Saint-Simon, if we granted him with our eyes shut, duly signed and sealed, the license to satanize. And yet, in keeping this man occupied while

Mme Verdurin, for the sinner's good and indeed rightly tempted by such a cure of souls, proceeds—by speaking plainly to the young fool—to remove from him all that he loves, to deal him perhaps a fatal blow, it seems to me that I am leading him into what one might call an ambush, and I recoil as though from a base action.”

This said, he did not hesitate to commit it, but, taking me by the arm, began: “Come, Baron, let's go and smoke a cigarette, this young man has not yet seen all the marvels of the hôtel.” I made the excuse that I was obliged to go home. “Just wait a moment,” said Brichot. “You remember, you are giving me a lift and I have not forgotten your promise.”

“Wouldn't you like me, really, to make them bring out their silverware? Nothing could be simpler,” M. de Charlus said to me. “You promised me, remember, not a word about Morel's decoration. I mean to give him the surprise of announcing it presently when people have begun to leave, although he says that it is of no importance to an artist, but that his uncle would like him to have it” (I blushed, for, I thought to myself, the Verdurins would know through my grandfather what Morel's uncle was).⁴³⁷ “Then you wouldn't like me to ask them to bring out the best pieces,” said M. de Charlus. “Of course, you know them already, you have seen them a dozen times at La Raspelière.”

I dared not tell him that what might have interested me was not the mediocrity of even the most splendid silver in a middle-class household, but some specimen, were it only reproduced in a fine engraving, of Mme du Barry's. I was far too preoccupied—even if I had not been by this revelation as to Mlle Vinteuil's expected presence—always, in society, I was far too distracted and agitated to fasten my attention upon objects that were more or less beautiful. It could have been arrested only by the appeal of some reality that addressed itself to my imagination, as might have been, this evening, a picture of that Venice of which I had thought so much during the afternoon, or some general element, common to several forms and truer than they, which, of its own accord, never failed to arouse in me an inner appreciation, normally lulled in slumber, the rising of which to the surface of my consciousness filled me with great joy. Now, as I emerged from the room known as the concert room and crossed the other drawing rooms with Brichot and M. de Charlus, on discovering, transposed among others, certain pieces of furniture that I had seen at La Raspelière and to which I had paid no attention, I perceived, between the arrangement of the hôtel and

that of the large country house, a certain common air of family life, a permanent identity, and I understood what Brichot meant when he said to me with a smile: “There, look at this room, it may perhaps give you an idea of what things were like in the rue Montalivet, twenty-five years ago, *grande mortalis aevi spatium*.”⁴³⁸ From his smile, a tribute to the defunct salon that he saw with his mind’s eye, I understood that what Brichot, perhaps without realizing it, preferred in the old drawing room, more than the large windows, more than the merry youth of his hosts and their faithful, was that unreal part (which I myself could discern from some similarities between La Raspelière and quai Conti) of which, in a drawing room as in everything else, the external, actual part, verifiable by everyone, is but the prolongation, was that part become purely imaginary, of a color that no longer existed except for my elderly guide, which he was incapable of making me see, the part that has detached itself from the outer world, to take refuge in our soul, to which it gives a surplus value, in which it is assimilated to its normal substance, transforming itself—houses that have been pulled down, people long dead, bowls of fruit at the suppers that we recall—into that translucent alabaster of our memories, the color of which we are incapable of displaying, since we alone see it, which enables us to say truthfully to other people, speaking of things past, that they cannot form any idea of them, that they do not resemble anything that they have seen, while we are unable to think of them ourselves without a certain emotion, remembering that it is upon the existence of our thoughts that there depends, for a little time still, their survival, the brilliance of the lamps that have been extinguished and the fragrance of the arbors that will never bloom again. And possibly, for this reason, the drawing room in the rue Montalivet disparaged, for Brichot, the Verdurins’ present home. But, on the other hand, it added to this home, in the professor’s eyes, a beauty that it could not have for a newcomer. Those pieces of the original furniture that had been transported here, and sometimes arranged in the same groups, and which I myself remembered from La Raspelière, introduced into the new drawing room fragments of the old which, at certain moments, recalled it so vividly as to create a hallucination and then seemed themselves scarcely real from having evoked in the midst of the surrounding reality fragments of a vanished world that seemed to extend around about them. A sofa that had risen up from dreamland between a pair of new and thoroughly substantial armchairs, smaller chairs upholstered in pink silk, the cloth

surface of a card table raised to the dignity of a person since, like a person, it had a past, a memory, retaining in the chill and gloom of the quai Conti the tan of its roasting by the sun through the windows of the rue Montalivet (where it could tell the time of day as accurately as Mme Verdurin herself) and through the glass doors at La Raspelière, where they had taken it and where it used to gaze out all day long over the flowerbeds of the garden at the valley far below, until it was time for Cottard and the violinist to sit down to their game; a bouquet of violets and pansies in pastel, the gift of a painter friend, now dead, the sole fragment that survived of a life that had vanished without leaving any trace, summarizing a great talent and a long friendship, recalling his attentive, gentle eyes, his shapely hand, plump and melancholy as he painted; the incoherent, charming disorder of the gifts of the faithful, which have followed the lady of the house on all her travels and have come in time to assume the fixity of a trait of character, of a line of destiny; a profusion of cut flowers, of chocolate boxes that, here as in the country, systematized their growth in an identical mode of blossoming; the curious interpolation of those singular and superfluous objects that still appear to have been just taken from the box in which they were offered and remain forever what they were at first, New Year's Day presents; all those things, in short, that one could not have isolated from the rest, but which for Brichot, an old habitu   of the Verdurin parties, had that patina, that velvety bloom of things to which, giving them a sort of profundity, a mystical counterpart has been added; all these things scattered before him, sounded in his ear like so many resonant keys that awakened cherished likenesses in his heart, confused reminiscences that, here in this drawing room of the present day that was littered with them, cut out, defined, as on a fine day a shaft of sunlight cuts a section in the atmosphere, the furniture and carpets, and pursuing it from a cushion to a flower stand, from a footstool to a lingering scent, from the lighting arrangements to the color scheme, carved, evoked, spiritualized, called to life, a form that might be called the ideal aspect, immanent in each of their successive homes, of the Verdurin drawing room.

“We must try,” Brichot whispered in my ear, “to get the baron on his favorite topic. He is prodigious.” Now on the one hand I was glad of an opportunity to try to obtain from M. de Charlus information as to the coming of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, information in pursuit of which I had decided to leave Albertine. On the other hand, I did not wish to leave

Albertine too long by herself, not that she could (being uncertain of the moment of my return, not to mention that, at so late an hour, she could not have received a visitor or left the house herself without being noticed) make any vile use of my absence, but simply so that she might not find it too long. And so I told Brichot and M. de Charlus that I must shortly leave them.

“Come with us all the same,” said the baron, whose social excitement was beginning to flag, but feeling that need to prolong, to spin out a conversation, which I had already observed in the Duchesse de Guermantes as well as in himself, and which, while distinctive of their family, extends in a more general fashion to all those people who, offering their minds no other fulfillment than talk, that is to say an imperfect fulfillment, remain unassuaged even after hours spent in one’s company, and attach themselves more and more hungrily to their exhausted interlocutor, from whom they mistakenly expect a satiety that social pleasures are incapable of giving. “Come, won’t you,” he repeated, “this is the pleasant moment at a party, the moment when all the guests have gone, the hour of Doña Sol;⁴³⁹ let us hope that it will end less tragically. Unfortunately, you are in a hurry, in a hurry probably to go and do things that you would much better leave undone. People are always in a hurry and leave at the moment when they ought to be arriving. We are here like Couture’s philosophers,⁴⁴⁰ this is the moment to go over the events of the evening, to make what is called in military jargon a critique of the operations. We might ask Mme Verdurin to send us in a little supper to which we should take care not to invite her, and we might request Charlie—still *Hernani*—to play for ourselves alone the sublime adagio. Isn’t it beautiful, that adagio? But where is the young violinist, I would like to congratulate him, this is the moment for tender words and embraces. Admit, Brichot, that they played like gods, Morel especially. Did you notice the moment when that lock of hair came loose? Ah, then, my dear fellow, you saw nothing at all. There was an F sharp to make Enesco, Capet,⁴⁴¹ and Thibaud die of jealousy; I may have appeared calm enough, but I can tell you that at such a sound my heart was so wrung that I could barely control my tears. The whole room sat breathless; Brichot, my dear fellow,” cried the baron, gripping the other’s arm and shaking it violently, “it was sublime. Only young Charlie preserved a stony immobility, you could not even see him breathe, he looked like one of those objects of the

inanimate world of which Théodore Rousseau speaks,⁴⁴² which make us think, but do not think themselves. And then, all of a sudden,” cried M. de Charlus emphatically, as though miming a coup de théâtre, “then . . . the Lock! And all the time, the graceful little contredanse of the allegro vivace. You know, that lock was the sign of a revelation, even to the most obtuse. The Princess of Taormina, deaf until then, for there are none so deaf as those that have ears and hear not, the Princess of Taormina, confronted by the message of the miraculous lock, realized that it was music that they were playing and not poker. Oh, that was indeed a solemn moment.”

“Excuse me, Monsieur, for interrupting you,” I said to M. de Charlus, to bring him to the subject in which I was interested, “you told me that the composer’s daughter was to be present. I would have been most interested to meet her. Are you certain that she was expected?”

“Oh, that I couldn’t say.” M. de Charlus thus complied, perhaps unconsciously, with that universal rule by which people withhold information from a jealous lover, whether in order to show an absurd “comradeship,” as a point of honor, and even if they detest her, with the woman who has excited his jealousy, or out of malice toward her, because they guess that jealousy can only intensify love, or from that need to be disagreeable to other people that consists in revealing the truth to the rest of the world but concealing it from the jealous, ignorance increasing their torment, or so at least they suppose; and in order to cause people pain are guided by what they themselves believe, wrongly perhaps, to be most painful. “You know,” he went on, “in this house they are a trifle prone to exaggerate; they are charming people, still they do like to announce celebrities of one sort or another. But you are not looking well, and you will catch cold in this damp room,” he said, pushing a chair toward me. “Since you haven’t been well, you must take care of yourself, I’m going to find your coat. No, don’t go for it yourself, you’ll lose your way and catch cold. How careless people are; you might be an infant in arms, you want an old nanny like me to look after you.” “Don’t trouble, Baron, I’ll go,” said Brichot, and left us immediately; not being precisely aware perhaps of the very warm affection that M. de Charlus had for me and of the charming lapses into simplicity and devotion that alternated with his delirious crises of grandeur and persecution, he was afraid that M. de Charlus, whom Mme Verdurin had entrusted like a prisoner to his vigilance, might simply be

seeking, under the pretext of asking for my overcoat, to return to Morel and might thus upset the Mistress's plan.

Meanwhile Ski had sat down, uninvited, at the piano, and assuming—with a playful knitting of his brows, a distant gaze and a slight twist of his lips—what he imagined to be an artistic air, was insisting that Morel should play something by Bizet.⁴⁴³ “What, you don't like it, that boyish music of Bizet. Why, my dearr fellow,” he said, with that rolling of the letter *r*, which was one of his peculiarities, “it's rravishing.” Morel, who did not like Bizet, said so in exaggerated terms and (as he had the reputation in the little clan of being, though it seems incredible, a wit) Ski, pretending to take the violinist's diatribes as paradoxes, burst out laughing. His laugh was not, like M. Verdurin's, the choking gasp of a smoker. Ski first of all assumed a subtle air, then let escape, as though in spite of himself, a single note of laughter, like the first clang from a belfry, followed by a silence in which the subtle gaze seemed to be astutely examining the absurdity of what had been said, then a second peal of laughter shook the air, followed presently by a merry Angelus.⁴⁴⁴

I expressed to M. de Charlus my regret that M. Brichot should be taking so much trouble. “Not at all, he is delighted, he is very fond of you, everyone is fond of you. Somebody was saying only the other day: ‘We never see him now, he is isolating himself!’ Besides, Brichot is such a good fellow,” M. de Charlus went on, never suspecting probably, in view of the affectionate, frank manner in which the Professor of Moral Philosophy conversed with him, that he had no hesitation in ridiculing him behind his back. “He is a man of great merit, immensely learned, and his learning hasn't spoiled him, hasn't turned him into a bookworm, like so many of them who smell of ink. He has retained a breadth of outlook, a tolerance, rare in his kind. Sometimes, when one sees how well he understands life, with what a natural grace he renders everyone his due, one asks oneself where a humble little Sorbonne professor, a former schoolmaster, can have learned all that. I am astonished at it myself.”

I was even more astonished when I saw the conversation of this Brichot, which the least refined of Mme de Guermantes's friends would have found so dull, so heavy, please the most critical of them all, M. de Charlus. But to achieve this result there had converged, among other influences, themselves distinct also, those by virtue of which Swann, on the one hand, had so long

found favor with the little clan, when he was in love with Odette,⁴⁴⁵ and on the other hand, after he married, found an attraction in Mme Bontemps who, pretending to adore the Swann couple, came frequently to call upon the wife and reveled in all the husband's stories, and spoke of the couple with disdain. Just as a writer gives the palm for intelligence, not to the most intelligent man, but to the reveler who utters a bold and tolerant comment on the passion of a man for a woman, a comment that makes the writer's bluestocking mistress agree with him in deciding that of all the people who come to her house the least stupid is after all this old beau who is experienced in matters of love, so M. de Charlus found more intelligent than the rest of his friends Brichot, who was not merely kind to Morel, but would cull from the Greek philosophers, the Latin poets, the Oriental storytellers, appropriate texts that decorated the baron's propensity with a strange and charming florilegium.⁴⁴⁶ M. de Charlus had reached the age at which a Victor Hugo chooses to surround himself, above all, with Vacqueries and Meurices.⁴⁴⁷ He preferred to all others those men who tolerated his outlook upon life. "I see a great deal of him," he went on, in cadenced chirps, allowing no movement, except his lips, to stir his grave, powdered mask over which were purposely lowered his ecclesiastical eyelids. "I attend his lectures, that atmosphere of the Latin Quarter refreshes me, there is a studious, thoughtful adolescence of young bourgeois, more intelligent, better read than were, in a different sphere, my own contemporaries. It is a different world, which you know probably better than I, they are young *bourgeois*," he said, detaching the last word to which he prefixed a string of *b*'s, and emphasizing it from a sort of elocutionary habit, corresponding itself to a taste for fine distinctions in meaning, which was peculiar to him, but perhaps also from an inability to resist the pleasure of giving me a flick of his insolence. This did not in any way diminish the great and affectionate pity that M. de Charlus inspired in me (after Mme Verdurin had revealed her plan in my hearing), it merely amused me, and indeed on any other occasion when I did feel so kindly disposed toward him, would not have offended me. I derived from my grandmother such an absence of any self-importance that I might easily be found wanting in dignity. Doubtless, I was little aware of this, and by dint of having seen and heard, from my schooldays onward, my most highly regarded companions refuse to tolerate an affront, refuse to overlook any disloyal behavior, I had

come in time to exhibit in my speech and actions a second nature that was stamped with pride. I was indeed considered extremely proud, because, as I had never been fearful, I had been easily led into duels,⁴⁴⁸ the moral prestige of which, however, I diminished by making little of them, which easily persuaded other people that they were absurd. But the true nature that we suppress continues nevertheless to abide within us. Thus it is that at times, if we read the latest masterpiece of a man of genius, we are delighted to find in it all those of our own reflections that we have despised, joys and sorrows that we have repressed, a whole world of feelings scorned by us, and whose value the book in which we rediscover them suddenly teaches us. I had come in time to learn from my experience of life that it was a mistake to smile a friendly smile when somebody made fun of me, instead of getting angry. But this lack of self-importance and resentment, if I had so far ceased to express it as to have become almost entirely unaware that it existed in me, was nevertheless the primitive, vital element in which I was steeped. Anger and spite came to me only in a wholly different manner, in fits of anger. What was more, the sense of justice was so far lacking in me as to amount to an entire lack of moral sense. I was in my heart of hearts entirely won over to the side of the weaker party and of anyone who was in trouble. I had no opinion as to the proportion in which good and evil might be blended in the relations between Morel and M. de Charlus, but the thought of the sufferings that were being prepared for M. de Charlus was intolerable to me. I would have liked to warn him, but did not know how to do it.

“The spectacle of all that laborious little world is very pleasant to an old stick like me. I do not know them,” he went on, raising his hand with a demurring air—so as not to appear to be boasting of his own conquests, to testify to his own purity and not to allow any suspicion to hover over that of the students, “but they are most polite, they often go so far as to keep a place for me, since I am a very old gentleman. Yes indeed, my dear boy, do not protest, I’m past forty,” said the baron, who was past sixty. “It is a trifle stuffy in the amphitheater where Brichot lectures, but it is always interesting.”

Although the baron preferred to mingle with the youth of the schools, indeed, to be jostled by them, sometimes, to save him a long wait in the lecture hall, Brichot took him in by his own door. Brichot might well be at home in the Sorbonne, but at the moment when the porter,⁴⁴⁹ loaded with

chains of office, stepped out before him, and the master admired by his young students followed, he could not repress a certain timidity, and much as he desired to profit by that moment in which he felt himself so important to show his amiability toward Charlus, he was nonetheless slightly embarrassed; so that the porter would allow him in, he said to him, in an artificial tone and with a busy air: "Follow me, Baron, they'll find a place for you," then, without paying any more attention to him, to make his own entry, he advanced by himself briskly along the corridor. On either side, a double hedge of young professors greeted him; Brichot, eager not to appear to be posing in the eyes of these young men to whom he knew that he was a great pontiff, bestowed on them countless winks, countless little nods of connivance, to which his desire to remain martial, thoroughly French, gave the effect of a sort of cordial encouragement, of *sursum corda*⁴⁵⁰ by an old soldier saying: "Damn it all, we can face the foe." Then the applause of his students broke out. Brichot sometimes extracted from this attendance by M. de Charlus at his lectures an opportunity for giving pleasure, almost for returning hospitality. He would say to some parent, or to one of his bourgeois friends: "If it would interest your wife or daughter, I may tell you that the Baron de Charlus, Prince d'Agrigente, a descendant of the House of Condé,⁴⁵¹ will be attending my lecture. For a young person, it is something to remember, having seen one of the last descendants of our aristocracy who preserves the type. If they care to come, they will recognize him because he will be sitting next to my chair. Besides he will be alone there, a stout man, with white hair and a black moustache, wearing the military medal." "Oh, thank you," said the father. And, although his wife had other engagements, so as not to disoblige Brichot, he made her attend the lecture, while the daughter, troubled by the heat and the crowd, nevertheless devoured eagerly with her eyes the descendant of Condé, marveling all the same that he was not wearing a ruff⁴⁵² and looked just like any other man of the present day. He meanwhile had no eyes for her, but more than one student, who did not know who he was, was amazed at his friendly glances, became self-conscious and stiff, and the baron left the room full of dreams and melancholy.

"Forgive me if I return to the subject," I said quickly to M. de Charlus, for I could hear Brichot returning, "but could you let me know by wire if you should hear that Mlle Vinteuil or her friend is expected in Paris, letting

me know exactly how long they will be staying and without telling anybody that I asked you.” I had almost ceased to believe that she had been expected, but I wished to be prepared for the future. “Yes, I will do that for you, first of all because I owe you a great debt of gratitude. By not accepting what, long ago, I had offered you, you rendered me, to your own loss, an immense service, you left me my liberty. It is true that I have abdicated it in another fashion,” he added in a melancholy tone beneath which was visible a desire to take me into his confidence; “that is what I continue to regard as the major factor, a whole combination of circumstances that you failed to turn to your own account, possibly because fate warned you at that precise minute not to bar my path. For always ‘man proposes and God disposes.’”⁴⁵³ Who knows whether if, on the day when we came away together from Mme de Villeparisis’s, you had accepted, perhaps many things that have since happened would never have occurred?”⁴⁵⁴

In some embarrassment, I turned the conversation by seizing the name of Mme de Villeparisis and saying how sad I had been to learn of her death.⁴⁵⁵ “Ah, yes,” M. de Charlus murmured drily with the most insolent tone, taking note of my condolences without appearing to believe for a second in their sincerity. Seeing that in any case the subject of Mme de Villeparisis was not painful to him, I sought to find out from him, so admirably qualified in every respect, for what reasons Mme de Villeparisis seemed to be held at distance by the aristocratic world. Not only did he not give me the solution of this little social problem, he did not even appear to me to be aware of its existence. I then realized that the position of Mme de Villeparisis, if it was in later years to appear great to posterity, and even in the marquise’s lifetime to the ignorant commonalty, had appeared no less great at the opposite extremity of society, that which touched Mme de Villeparisis, to the Guermantes. She was their aunt; they saw first and foremost birth, connections by marriage, the opportunity of impressing some sister-in-law with the importance of their own family. They regarded this less from the social than from the family point of view. Now this was more brilliant in the case of Mme de Villeparisis than I had supposed. I had been surprised when I heard that the title Villeparisis was falsely assumed.⁴⁵⁶ But there are other examples of great ladies who have married beneath themselves and preserved a predominant position in society. M. de Charlus began by informing me that Mme de Villeparisis was a niece of the

famous Duchesse de—, the most celebrated member of the higher aristocracy during the July Monarchy,⁴⁵⁷ although she had refused to associate with the Citizen King and his family.⁴⁵⁸ I had so longed to hear stories about this duchess! And Mme de Villeparisis, the kind Mme de Villeparisis, with those cheeks that to me had been the cheeks of a middle-class lady, Mme de Villeparisis who sent me so many presents and whom I could so easily have seen every day, Mme de Villeparisis was her niece, brought up by her, in her home, at the Hôtel de—. “She asked the Duc de Doudeauville,” M. de Charlus told me, “speaking of the three sisters, ‘Which of the sisters do you prefer?’ And when Doudeauville said: ‘Madame de Villeparisis,’ the Duchesse de—replied ‘Pig!’ For the duchess was extremely *witty*,” said M. de Charlus, giving the word the importance and the special pronunciation that was customary among the Guermantes. That he should have thought the expression so “witty” did not, however, surprise me, for I had on many other occasions remarked the centrifugal, objective tendency that leads men to abdicate, when they are relishing the wit of others, the severity with which they would criticize their own, and to observe, to record faithfully, what they would have scorned to create.

“But what on earth is he doing, that is my overcoat he is bringing,” he said, on seeing that Brichot had made so long a search to no better result. “I would have done better to go for it myself. However, you can put it over your shoulders now. Are you aware that it is highly compromising, my dear boy, it is like drinking out of the same glass, I will be able to read your thoughts. No, not like that, come, let me do it,” and as he put me into his overcoat, he pressed it down on my shoulders, fastened it around my throat, and brushed my chin with his hand, apologizing: “At his age, he doesn’t know how to put on a coat, one has to pamper him, I have missed my vocation, Brichot, I was born to be a nanny.”

I wanted to go home, but as M. de Charlus having expressed his intention of going in search of Morel, Brichot detained us both. Moreover, the certainty that when I went home I would find Albertine there, a certainty as absolute as I had felt in the afternoon that Albertine would return home from the Trocadéro, made me at this moment as little impatient to see her as I had been then when I was sitting at the piano, after Françoise had telephoned me. And it was this calm that enabled me, whenever, in the course of this conversation, I attempted to rise, to obey the injunctions of Brichot who was afraid that my departure might prevent Charlus from

remaining with him until the moment when Mme Verdurin would come and fetch us. "Come," he said to the baron, "stay a little here with us, you will give him the accolade presently," Brichot added, fastening upon me his almost sightless eyes to which the many operations that he had undergone had restored some degree of life, but which no longer had the mobility necessary to the sidelong expression of malice.

"The accolade, how absurd!" cried the baron, in a shrill and rapturous tone. "My dear boy, I tell you, he imagines he is at a prize-giving, he is dreaming of his young students. I wonder whether he doesn't sleep with them."

"You wish to meet Mlle Vinteuil," said Brichot, who had overheard the last words of our conversation. "I promise to let you know if she comes, I will hear of it from Mme Verdurin," for he doubtless foresaw that the baron was in peril of an immediate exclusion from the little clan.

"I see, so you think that I have less claim than yourself upon Mme Verdurin," said M. de Charlus, "to be informed of the arrival of these terribly disreputable persons. You know that they are quite notorious. Mme Verdurin is wrong to allow them to come here, they are all very well for the shady set. They are friends with a terrible gang, and they must meet in the most appalling places."

At each of these words, my suffering was increased by a new suffering, changing in form. And suddenly remembering certain gestures of impatience that Albertine immediately repressed, I was seized with fear that she had formed a plan to leave me. This suspicion made it even more imperative for me to make certain that our life together would continue until such time when I had recovered my calm. And to make Albertine abandon the idea, if she had one, of preempting my plan to break up with her, to make her chains seem lighter, until I could bring it off without suffering, the cleverest plan (perhaps I was contaminated by M. de Charlus's presence, by the unconscious memory of the comedies that he liked to play), the cleverest plan seemed to me to make Albertine believe that I myself intended to leave her. As soon as I returned home, I would simulate farewells, a break.

"Certainly not, I don't think that I have any better claim than yourself upon Mme Verdurin," Brichot protested, punctuating his words, for he was afraid that he might have aroused the baron's suspicions. And as he saw that I was determined to go, seeking to detain me with the bait of the promised

entertainment: “There is one thing that the baron seems to me not to have taken into account when he speaks of the reputation of these two ladies, namely that a person’s reputation may be at the same time appalling and undeserved. Thus, for example, in the more notorious group, which I will call parallel, it is certain that the errors of justice are many and that history has registered convictions for sodomy against illustrious men who were wholly innocent of the charge. The recent discovery of Michelangelo’s passionate love for a woman⁴⁵⁹ is a new fact that should entitle the friend of Leo X⁴⁶⁰ to the benefit of a posthumous retrial. The Michelangelo case seems to me clearly indicated to excite the snobs and mobilize the Villette,⁴⁶¹ when another case in which anarchy reared its head and became the fashionable sin of our worthy dilettantes, but which must not even be mentioned now for fear of stirring up quarrels, will have run its course.”⁴⁶² From the moment when Brichot began to speak of masculine reputations, M. de Charlus betrayed on every one of his features that special sort of impatience that one sees on the face of a medical or military expert when society people who know nothing about the subject begin to talk nonsense about points of therapeutics or strategy.

“You don’t know the first thing about these matters,” he finally said to Brichot. “Give me a single example of a reputation that is undeserved. Mention names. Oh yes, I know the whole story,” was his brutal retort to a timid interruption by Brichot, “the people who tried it once long ago out of curiosity, or out of affection for a dead friend, and the man who, afraid he has gone too far, if you speak to him of the beauty of a man, replies that it’s Greek to him, that he can no more distinguish between a beautiful man and an ugly one than between the engines of two automobiles, mechanics not being in his line. That’s all stuff and nonsense. Mind you, I don’t mean to say that a bad (or what is conventionally so called) and yet undeserved reputation is absolutely impossible. It is so exceptional, so rare, that for practical purposes, it doesn’t exist. At the same time I, who have a certain curiosity in ferreting things out, have known cases that were not mythical. Yes, in the course of my life, I have ascertained (scientifically speaking, of course, you mustn’t take me too literally) two unjustified reputations. They generally arise from a similarity of names, or from certain outward signs, a profusion of rings, for example, which persons who are not qualified to judge imagine to be characteristic of what you were mentioning, just as they

think that a peasant never utters a sentence without adding: '*jarniguié*,'^{[463](#)} or an Englishman: 'Goddam.' Dialogue for the boulevard theaters."

M. de Charlus surprised me greatly by citing among the inverts "the friend of the actress" whom I had seen at Balbec and who was the leader of the little society of the four friends.^{[464](#)}

"But this actress, then?"

"She serves him as a screen and, besides, he has relations with her, more perhaps than with men, with whom he scarcely has any."

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“He has relations with the other three?”

“No, not at all! They are friends, nothing like that! Two like only women. One of them is, but is not sure about his friend, and anyway, they hide it from each other. What will surprise you is that the unjustified reputations are those most firmly established in the eyes of the public. You yourself, Brichot, who would thrust your hand in the flames to answer for the virtue of some man or other who comes to this house and whom the enlightened recognize at once, you feel obliged to believe like everyone else what is said about some man in the public eye who is the incarnation of those propensities to the common herd, when as a matter of fact, he doesn’t care two sous for that sort of thing. I say two sous, because if we were to offer twenty-five louis, we would see the number of plaster saints dwindle down to nothing. As things are, the average rate of sanctity, if you see any sanctity in that sort of thing, is somewhere between three and four out of ten.”

If Brichot had transferred to the male sex the question of bad reputations, with me it was, conversely, to the female sex that, thinking of Albertine, I applied the baron’s words. I was appalled at his statistics, even when I bore in mind that he was probably inflating his figures to reach the total that he would like to believe true and had based them moreover upon the reports of persons who were scandalmongers and possibly liars, and had in any case been led astray by their own desire, which, coming in addition to that of M. de Charlus, doubtless falsified the baron’s calculations.

“Three out of ten!” exclaimed Brichot. “Why, even if the proportions were reversed I would still have to multiply the guilty a hundredfold. If it is as you say, Baron, and you are not mistaken, then we must confess that you are one of those rare visionaries who discern a truth that nobody around them has ever suspected. Just as Barrès⁴⁶⁵ made discoveries as to parliamentary corruption, the truth of which was afterward established, like the existence of Le Verrier’s planet.⁴⁶⁶ Mme Verdurin would prefer to cite men whom I would rather not name who detected in the Intelligence Bureau, in the General Staff, activities inspired, I am sure, by patriotic zeal, which I had never imagined. On freemasonry, German espionage, morphinomania, Léon Daudet writes, day by day, a prodigious fairy tale that turns out to be the barest truth.⁴⁶⁷ Three out of ten!” Brichot repeated in astonishment. It is true to say that M. de Charlus taxed the great majority of his contemporaries with inversion, always excepting those men with whom

he himself had had relations, their case, provided that a little romance had been mingled in those relations, appearing to him more complex. So it is that we see men about town, who refuse to believe in women's honor, allow some remnants of honor only to the woman who has been their mistress, as to whom they protest sincerely and with an air of mystery: "No, you are mistaken, she is not a whore." This unlooked-for tribute is dictated partly by their own pride, which is flattered by the supposition that such favors have been reserved for them alone, partly by their naïveté, which makes them swallow everything that their mistress has led them to believe, partly from that sense of the complexity of life that brings it about that, as soon as we are close to other people, other lives, ready-made labels and classifications appear unduly crude. "Three out of ten! But have a care; less fortunate than the historians whose conclusions the future will justify, Baron, if you were to present to posterity the statistics that you offer us, it might find them erroneous. Posterity judges only on documentary evidence and will insist on seeing your dossier. But as no document would be forthcoming to authenticate this sort of collective phenomena that the few persons who are enlightened are only too ready to leave in obscurity, the best minds would be moved to indignation, and you would be regarded as nothing more than a slanderer or a lunatic. After having, in the social examinations, obtained top marks and the primacy upon this earth, you would taste the sorrows of a blackball beyond the grave. It's not worth powder and shot, to quote—may God forgive me—our friend Bossuet."⁴⁶⁸

"I am not interested in history," replied M. de Charlus, "this life is sufficient for me, it is quite interesting enough, as poor Swann used to say."

"What, you knew Swann, Baron, I was not aware of that. Tell me, was he that way inclined?" Brichot inquired with an air of misgiving.

"What a foul mind the man has! So you suppose that I only know men like that. No, I don't think so," said Charlus, lowering his eyes and trying to weigh the pros and cons. And deciding that, since he was dealing with Swann, whose hostility to that sort of thing had always been notorious, a half-admission could only be harmless to him who was its object and flattering to him who allowed it to escape in an insinuation: "I don't deny that long ago in our schooldays, once by accident," said the baron, as though unwillingly and as though he were thinking aloud, then recovering himself: "But that was centuries ago, how do you expect me to remember, you're embarrassing me," he concluded with a laugh.

“In any case, he was never what you’d call a beauty!” said Brichot who, himself hideous, thought himself good-looking and was always ready to believe that other men were ugly.

“Hold your tongue,” said the baron, “you don’t know what you’re talking about, in those days he had a peaches and cream complexion, and,” he added, finding a fresh note for each syllable, “he was as beautiful as Adonis himself.⁴⁶⁹ Besides, he was always charming. The women were madly in love with him.”

“But did you ever know his wife?”

“Why, it was through me that he came to know her. I thought her charming in her semi-transvestite costume one evening when she played Miss Sacripant;⁴⁷⁰ I was with some fellows from the club, each of us took a woman home with him, and, although all that I wanted was to go to sleep, slanderous tongues alleged, for it is terrible how malicious people are, that I went to bed with Odette. Only she took advantage of the slanders to come and bother me, and I thought I might get rid of her by introducing her to Swann. From that day on she never let me go. She couldn’t spell the simplest word; it was I who wrote all her letters for her. And it was I who, afterward, had to take her out. That, my boy, is what comes of having a good reputation, you see. Though I only half deserved it. She forced me to arrange the most awful orgies for her, with five or six men.” And the lovers whom Odette had had in succession (she had been with this man, then with that one, those men about whom poor Swann, blinded by jealousy and by love, had never known anything, by turns reckoning the chances and believing in oaths more affirmative than a contradiction that escapes from the guilty woman’s lips, a contradiction far more elusive, and at the same time far more significant, of which the jealous lover might take advantage more logically than of the information that he falsely pretends to have received, in the hope of perturbing his mistress), these lovers M. de Charlus began to enumerate with as absolute a certainty as if he had been reciting the list of the Kings of France. And indeed the jealous lover is, like the contemporaries of a historical event, too close, he knows nothing, and it is in the eyes of strangers that the chronicle of adultery assumes the precision of history, and prolongs itself in lists of names that are, for that matter, indifferent and become painful only to another jealous lover, such as myself, who cannot help comparing his own case with the one he hears mentioned and asks himself whether the woman he suspects cannot boast an

equally illustrious list. But he can never know anything more, it is a sort of universal conspiracy, a “blindman’s buff” in which everyone cruelly participates, and which consists, while his mistress flits from one to another, in holding over his eyes a bandage that he is perpetually attempting to tear off without success, for everyone keeps him blindfolded, poor wretch, the kind out of kindness, the wicked out of malice, the coarse-minded out of their love of coarse jokes, the well-bred out of politeness and good breeding, and all alike respecting one of those conventions that are called principles.

“But did Swann never know that you had enjoyed her favors?”

“What an idea! If you had suggested such a thing to Charles! It’s enough to make one’s hair stand up on end. Why, my dear fellow, he would have killed me on the spot, he was as jealous as a tiger. Any more than I ever confessed to Odette, not that she would have minded in the least, that . . . but you mustn’t make my tongue run away with me. And the joke of it is that it was she who fired a revolver at him, and nearly hit me. Oh! I used to have a fine time with that couple; and naturally it was I who was obliged to act as his second against d’Osmond, who never forgave me. D’Osmond had carried off Odette and Swann, to console himself, had taken as his mistress, or make-believe mistress, Odette’s sister. But really you must not begin to make me tell you Swann’s story, we would be here for ten years, don’t you know, nobody knows more about it than I do. It was I who used to take Odette out when she did not wish to see Charles. It was all the more awkward for me as I have a very close relative who bears the name Cr  cy, without of course having any manner of right to it, but still he was none too well pleased. For she went by the name of Odette de Cr  cy, as she very well might, being merely separated from a Cr  cy whose wife she still was, and quite an authentic person, a highly respectable gentleman out of whom she had drained his last centime. But why should I have to tell you about this Cr  cy, I have seen you with him on the twister, you used to invite him to dinner at Balbec.⁴⁷¹ He must have needed those dinners, poor fellow, he lived on a tiny allowance that Swann made him; I am greatly afraid that, since my friend’s death, that income must have stopped altogether. What I do not understand,” M. de Charlus said to me, “is that, since you used often to go to Charles’s, you did not ask me this evening to present you to the Queen of Naples. In fact I can see that you are not interested in *people* as curiosities, and that continues to surprise me in a person who knew Swann,

in whom that sort of interest was so far developed that it is impossible to say whether it was I who initiated him in these matters or he me. It surprises me as much as if I met a person who had known Whistler⁴⁷² and remained ignorant of what is meant by taste. Mon Dieu, it is especially important for Morel to meet her, he was passionately eager to do so, for he is the most intelligent fellow you could imagine. It is a nuisance that she has left. However, I will effect the conjunction one of these days. It is indispensable that he should know her. The only possible obstacle would be if she were to die in the night. Well, we may hope that that will not happen.”

All of a sudden Brichot, who was still suffering from the shock of the proportion “three out of ten” that M. de Charlus had revealed to him, Brichot who had continued all this time in the pursuit of his idea, with an abruptness that suggested that of a prosecuting attorney seeking to make a prisoner confess, but which was in reality the result of the professor’s desire to appear perspicacious and of the misgivings that he felt about launching so grave an accusation, spoke: “Isn’t Ski like that?” he inquired of M. de Charlus with a somber air. To make us admire his alleged power of intuition, he had chosen Ski, telling himself that since there were only three innocent men in every ten, he ran little risk of being mistaken if he named Ski, who seemed to him a trifle odd, suffered from insomnia, used scents, in short was not entirely normal.

“*Nothing of the sort!*” exclaimed the baron with a bitter, dogmatic, exasperated irony. “What you say is utterly false, absurd, so far from the truth. Ski is like that precisely to the people who know nothing about it; if he was, he would not look so like it, be it said without any intention to criticize, for he has a certain charm, indeed I find something very endearing about him.”

“But give us a few names, then,” Brichot pursued insistently.

M. de Charlus drew himself up with an insolent air. “Ah! my dear fellow, I, as you know, live in a world of abstraction, all that sort of thing interests me only from a transcendental point of view,” he replied with the touchy susceptibility peculiar to men of his kind, and the affectation of grandiloquence that characterized his conversation. “To me, you understand, it is only general principles that are of any interest, I speak to you of this as I might of the law of gravity.” But these moments of irritable reaction in which the baron sought to conceal his true life lasted but a short time compared with the hours of continual progression in which he allowed

it to be guessed, flaunted it with an irritating complacency, the need to confide being stronger in him than the fear of divulging his secret. “What I was trying to say,” he went on, “is that for one bad reputation that is unjustified there are hundreds of good ones that are no less so. Obviously, the number of those who do not merit their reputations varies according to whether you rely upon what is said by men of their sort or by the others. And it is true that if the malevolence of the latter is limited by the extreme difficulty that they would find in believing that a vice as horrible to them as robbery or murder is being practiced by men whom they know to be sensitive and kindhearted, the malevolence of the former is stimulated to excess by the desire to regard as—what shall I say?—accessible, men who appeal to them, upon the strength of information given them by people who have been led astray by a similar desire, in fact by the very aloofness with which they are generally regarded. I have heard a man, viewed with considerable disfavor on account of these tastes, say that he supposed that a certain man in society shared them. And his sole reason for believing it was that this other man had been polite to him! So many reasons for *optimism*,” said the baron artlessly, “in the computation of the number. But the true reason of the enormous difference that exists between the number calculated by the layman, and that calculated by the initiated, arises from the mystery with which the latter surround their actions, in order to conceal them from the rest, who, lacking any source of information, would be literally stupefied if they were to learn merely a quarter of the truth.”

“Then in our days, things are as they were among the Greeks,” said Brichot.

“What do you mean, among the Greeks? Do you suppose that it has not been going on ever since? Take the reign of Louis XIV, you have young Vermandois,⁴⁷³ Molière, Prince Louis of Baden,⁴⁷⁴ Brunswick,⁴⁷⁵ Charolais,⁴⁷⁶ Boufflers,⁴⁷⁷ the Great Condé,⁴⁷⁸ the Duc de Brissac.”⁴⁷⁹

“Stop a moment, I knew about Monsieur, I knew about Brissac from Saint-Simon,⁴⁸⁰ Vendôme⁴⁸¹ of course, and many others as well. But that old pest Saint-Simon often refers to the Great Condé and Prince Louis of Baden and never mentions it.”

“It seems a pity, I must say, that it should fall to me to teach a professor of the Sorbonne his history. But, my dear Master, you are as ignorant as a carp.”

“You are harsh, Baron, but just. And, wait a moment, now this will please you, I remember a song of the period composed in macaronic verse about a certain storm in which the Great Condé was caught as he was going down the Rhône in the company of his friend, the Marquis de La Moussaye.^{[482](#)} Condé says:

*Carus Amicus Mussaeus,
Ah! Deus bonus! quod tempus!
Landerirette,
Imbre sumus perituri.*

And La Moussaye reassures him with:

*Securae sunt nostrae vitae,
Sumus enim Sodomitae,
Igne tantum perituri,
Landeriri.^{[483](#)}*

“I take back what I said,” said Charlus in a shrill and mannered tone, “you are a well of learning, you will write it down for me, won’t you, I must preserve it in my family archives, since my great-great-great-grandmother was a sister of M. le Prince.”

“Yes, but, Baron, with regard to Prince Louis of Baden I can think of nothing. However, at that period, I suppose that generally speaking the art of war . . .”

“What nonsense! In that period alone you have, Vendôme, Villars,^{[484](#)} Prince Eugène,^{[485](#)} the Prince de Conti,^{[486](#)} and if I were to tell you of all the heroes of Tonkin, Morocco,^{[487](#)} and I am thinking of men who are truly sublime, and pious, and ‘new generation,’ you would be astonished. Ah! I would have something to teach the people who are making inquiries about the new generation that has rejected the futile complications of its elders, M. Bourget tells us!^{[488](#)} I have a young friend out there, who is highly spoken of, who has done great things; however, I am not going to tell tales out of school, let’s return to the seventeenth century; you know that Saint-Simon says of the Maréchal d’Huxelles—one among many: ‘Voluptuous in Grecian debaucheries that he made no attempt to conceal, he used to get hold of young officers whom he trained to his purpose, not to mention stalwart young valets, and this openly, in the army and at Strasbourg.’^{[489](#)} You have probably read Madame’s *Letters*, all his men called him ‘Putana.’ She is quite clear about it.”

“And she was in a good position to know, with her husband.”

“Such an interesting character, Madame,” said M. de Charlus. “One might base upon her the lyrical synthesis of ‘Wives of Aunties.’⁴⁹⁰ First of all, the masculine type; generally, the wife of an Auntie is a man,⁴⁹¹ that is what makes it so easy for her to bear him children. Then Madame does not talk about Monsieur’s vices, but she does talk incessantly about the same vice in other men, writing as someone in the know, from the tendency that makes us enjoy finding in other people’s families the same defects as afflict us in our own, in order to prove to ourselves that there is nothing exceptional or degrading in them. I was saying that things have been much the same in every age. Nevertheless, our own is quite remarkable in that respect. And notwithstanding the examples that I have borrowed from the seventeenth century, if my great ancestor François C. de La Rochefoucauld⁴⁹² were alive today, he might say of them with even more justification than of his own—come, Brichot, help me out: ‘Vices are common to every age; but if certain persons whom everyone knows had appeared in the first centuries of our era, would anyone speak today of the prostitutions of Heliogabalus?’⁴⁹³ ‘*Whom everyone knows*’ appeals to me immensely. I see that my sagacious kinsman understood the tricks of his most illustrious contemporaries as I understand those of my own. But men of that sort are not only far more numerous today. They have also special characteristics.” I could see that M. de Charlus was about to tell us in what fashion this type of mores had evolved. And not for an instant while he was talking, while Brichot was talking, was the more or less conscious image of my home—where Albertine awaited me—associated with the caressing and intimate motif of Vinteuil, absent from my mind. My thoughts constantly returned to Albertine, just as I myself must effectively return to her presently as to a sort of ball and chain to which I was, in one way or another, attached, which prevented me from leaving Paris and which at this moment, while in the Verdurin drawing room I evoked my own home, made me feel it, not like an empty space, exalting to one’s personality and rather sad, but as though filled—similar in that way to the hotel at Balbec on a certain evening—by that presence that didn’t budge from there, who remained there for me, and that, whenever I wished it, I was sure to find. The insistence with which M. de Charlus kept on reverting to this topic—into which, moreover, his intellect, constantly exercised in the same

direction, had acquired a certain penetration—was, in a complicated way, distinctly trying. He was as boring as a savant who can see nothing outside his own specialty, as irritating as a well-informed man whose vanity is flattered by the secrets that he possesses and is burning to divulge, as repellent as those people who, whenever their own defects are mentioned, open up and expatiate without noticing that they are giving offense, as obsessed as a maniac and as uncontrollably imprudent as a criminal. These characteristics, which, at certain moments, became as obvious as those that mark a madman or a criminal, brought me, as it happened, a certain consolation. For, subjecting them to the necessary transposition in order to be able to draw from them deductions with regard to Albertine, and remembering her attitude toward Saint-Loup,⁴⁹⁴ and toward me, I said to myself, painful as one of these memories and melancholy as the other was to me, I said to myself that they seemed to exclude the kind of deformation so plainly marked, the kind of specialization, inevitably exclusive, it seemed, that was so vehemently apparent in the conversation as in the person of M. de Charlus. But he, unfortunately, made haste to destroy these grounds for hope in the same way as he had furnished me with them, that is to say unwittingly. “Yes,” he said, “I am no longer twenty-five, and I have already seen many things change around about me. I no longer recognize either society, in which the barriers are broken down, in which a mob, devoid of elegance and decency, dances the tango even in my own family, or fashions, or politics, or the arts, or religion, or anything. But I must admit that the thing that has changed most of all is what the Germans call homosexuality.⁴⁹⁵ Mon Dieu, in my day, leaving aside the men who loathed women, and those who, caring only for women, did the other thing merely with an eye to profit, homosexuals were sound family men and never kept mistresses except as a cover. If I had had a daughter to give away, it is among them that I would have looked for my son-in-law if I had wished to be certain that she would not be unhappy. Alas! Things have changed entirely. Nowadays they are recruited also from the men who are the most insatiable with women. I thought I possessed a certain flair, and that when I said to myself: ‘Certainly not,’ I could not have been mistaken. Well, I give up. One of my friends, who is well-known for that sort of thing, had a coachman whom my sister-in-law Oriane found for him, a boy from Combray who was something of a jack of all trades, but particularly that of chasing skirts, and who, I would have sworn, was as hostile as possible to

anything of that sort. He broke his mistress's heart by betraying her with two women whom he adored, not to mention the others, an actress and a barmaid. My cousin the Prince de Guermantes, who has that irritating mentality of people who are too ready to believe anything, said to me one day: 'But why in the world doesn't X sleep with his coachman? It might give pleasure to Théodore'⁴⁹⁶ (which is the coachman's name) 'and he may be annoyed that his master does not make advances to him.' I could not help telling Gilbert to hold his tongue; I was overwrought both by that ostensible perspicacity which, when it is exercised indiscriminately, is a lack of perspicacity, and also by the obvious malice of my cousin who would have liked X to risk taking the first steps so that, if the going was good, he might follow."

"Then the Prince de Guermantes has those tastes too?"⁴⁹⁷ asked Brichot with a blend of astonishment and dismay.

"Mon Dieu," replied M. de Charlus, highly delighted, "it is so notorious that I don't think I am guilty of an indiscretion if I tell you that he does. Well, the following year after this, I went to Balbec, where I heard from a sailor who used to take me out fishing occasionally, that my Théodore, whose sister, I may mention, is the maid⁴⁹⁸ of a friend of Mme Verdurin, Baroness Putbus, used to come down to the harbor to pick up now one sailor, now another, with the most infernal nerve, to go for a trip on the sea 'with extras.'" It was now my turn to inquire whether the coachman's employer, whom I had identified as the gentleman who at Balbec used to play cards all day long with his mistress,⁴⁹⁹ was like the Prince of Guermantes.

"Why, of course, everyone knows about him, he makes no attempt to conceal it."

"But he had his mistress there with him."

"Well, and what difference does that make? How innocent these children are," he said to me in a fatherly tone, little suspecting the grief that I extracted from his words when I thought of Albertine. "She is charming, his mistress."

"But then his three friends are like himself."

"Not at all," he cried, stopping his ears as though, in playing some instrument, I had struck a wrong note.

“Now he has gone to the other extreme. So a man has no longer the right to have friends? Ah! youth; it gets everything wrong. We will have to begin your education over again, my boy. Well,” he went on, “I admit that this case, and I know of many others, however open a mind I may try to keep for every form of audacity, does embarrass me. I may be very old-fashioned, but I fail to understand,” he said in the tone of an old Gallican speaking of certain forms of Ultramontanism,⁵⁰⁰ or a liberal royalist speaking of the *Action française*,⁵⁰¹ or of a disciple of Claude Monet⁵⁰² speaking of the Cubists. “I don’t condemn these innovators, I envy them if anything, I try to understand them, but I cannot. If they are so passionately fond of women, why, and especially in this working-class world where that sort of thing is so frowned upon, where they conceal themselves from a sense of shame, have they any need of what they call ‘a bit of brown’?”⁵⁰³ It is because it represents to them something else. What?”

“What else can a woman represent to Albertine,” I thought, and there indeed lay the cause of my anguish.

“Decidedly, Baron,” said Brichot, “if the Board of Trustees ever thinks of founding a Chair of Homosexuality,⁵⁰⁴ I will see that your name is the first to be submitted. Or rather, no; an Institute of Special Psychophysiology would suit you better. And I can see you, best of all, provided with a chair in the Collège de France,⁵⁰⁵ which would enable you to devote yourself to personal researches the results of which you would deliver, like the Professor of Tamil or Sanskrit, to the handful of people who are interested in them. You would have an audience of two, with the porter, not that I mean to cast the slightest suspicion upon our corps of ushers, whom I believe to be above suspicion.”

“You know nothing about it,” the baron retorted in a harsh and trenchant tone. “Besides you are wrong in thinking that so few people are interested in the subject. It is just the opposite.” And without stopping to consider the incompatibility between the invariable trend of his own conversation and the reproach that he was about to heap upon others: “It is, on the contrary, most alarming,” said the baron, with a scandalized and contrite air, “people are talking about nothing else. It’s a disgrace, but I am not exaggerating, my dear fellow! It appears that, the day before yesterday, at the Duchesse d’Agen’s, they talked about nothing else for two hours on end. You can imagine, if women have taken to discussing that sort of thing, it is a positive

scandal! What is the most despicable of all is that they get their information,” he went on with an extraordinary fire and emphasis, “from pests, real scoundrels like young Châtellerault, about whom there is more to say than anyone, who tell them stories about other men. I have been told that he said more than enough to hang me, but I don’t care, I am convinced that the mud and filth flung by an individual who barely escaped being turned out of the Jockey for cheating at cards can only fall back on him. I am sure that if I were Jane d’Agen, I would have sufficient respect for my drawing room not to allow such subjects to be discussed there, nor to allow my own flesh and blood to be dragged through the mire in my house. But there is no longer any society, any rules, any proprieties, in conversation any more than in dress. Ah, my dear fellow, it is the end of the world. Everyone has become so malicious. The prize goes to the man who can speak most evil of his fellows. It is appalling!”

As cowardly still as I had been long ago in my boyhood at Combray when I used to run away in order not to see my grandfather tempted with cognac and the vain efforts of my grandmother imploring him not to drink it,⁵⁰⁶ I had but one thought in my mind, which was to leave the Verdurins’ house before the execution of M. de Charlus occurred. “I simply must go,” I said to Brichot.

“I am coming with you,” he replied, “but we cannot slip away, English fashion. Come and say goodbye to Mme Verdurin,” the professor concluded, as he made his way to the drawing room with the air of a man who, in a guessing game, goes to find out whether he may “come back.”

While we conversed, M. Verdurin, at a signal from his wife, had taken Morel aside. Indeed, had Mme Verdurin decided, after considering the matter in all its aspects, that it was wiser to postpone Morel’s enlightenment, she was powerless now to prevent it. There are certain desires, sometimes confined to the mouth, which, as soon as we have allowed them to grow, insist upon being gratified, whatever the consequences may be; we are unable to resist the temptation to kiss a bare shoulder at which we have been gazing for too long and at which our lips strike like a serpent at a bird, to bury our sweet tooth in a cake that has fascinated and famished it, nor can we forgo the delight of the amazement, anxiety, grief or mirth to which we can move another person by some unexpected communication. So, in a frenzy of melodrama, Mme Verdurin had ordered her husband to take Morel out of the room and, at all costs, to

explain matters to him. The violinist had begun by deploring the departure of the Queen of Naples before he had had a chance of being presented to her. M. de Charlus had told him so often that she was the sister of the Empress Élisabeth and of the Duchesse d'Alençon that Her Majesty had assumed an extraordinary importance in his eyes. But the Master explained to him that it was not to talk about the Queen of Naples that they had withdrawn from the rest, and then went straight to the root of the matter. "Listen," he had concluded after a long explanation; "listen; if you like, we can go and ask my wife what she thinks. I give you my word of honor, I've said nothing to her about it. We will see how she looks at it. My advice is perhaps not the best, but you know how sound her judgment is; besides, she is extremely fond of you, let's go and submit the case to her." And while Mme Verdurin, looking forward impatiently to the emotions that she would presently be relishing as she talked to the virtuoso, and again, after he had gone, when she made her husband give her a full report of their conversation, continued to repeat: "But what in the world can they be doing? I do hope that my husband, in keeping him all this time, has managed to give him his cue," M. Verdurin reappeared with Morel, who seemed greatly moved.

"He would like to ask your advice," M. Verdurin said to his wife, in the tone of a man who does not know whether his prayer will be heard. Instead of replying to M. Verdurin, it was to Morel that, in the heat of her passion, Mme Verdurin spoke. "I agree entirely with my husband, I consider that you cannot tolerate this sort of thing for another instant!" she exclaimed furiously, discarding as a useless fiction her agreement with her husband that she was supposed to know nothing of what he had been saying to the violinist.

"How do you mean? Tolerate what?" stammered M. Verdurin, endeavoring to feign astonishment and seeking, with an awkwardness that was explained by his dismay, to defend his falsehood.

"I guessed what you were saying to him," replied Mme Verdurin, undisturbed by the improbability of this explanation, and caring little what, when he recalled this scene, the violinist might think of the Mistress's veracity. "No," Mme Verdurin continued, "I feel that you ought not to endure any longer this degrading promiscuity with a tainted person whom nobody will have in her house," she went on, regardless of the fact that this was untrue and forgetting that she herself entertained him almost daily.

“You are the talk of the Conservatoire,” she added, feeling that this was the argument that carried most weight; “another month of this life and your artistic future is shattered, whereas, without Charlus, you ought to be making at least a hundred thousand francs a year.”

“But I have never heard anyone utter a word, I am astounded, I am very grateful to you,” Morel murmured, the tears starting to his eyes. But, being obliged at once to feign astonishment and to conceal his shame, he had turned redder and was perspiring more abundantly than if he had played all Beethoven’s sonatas in succession, and tears welled from his eyes, which the Bonn⁵⁰⁷ Master would certainly not have drawn from him.⁵⁰⁸

“If you have never heard anything, you are unique in that respect. He is a gentleman with a vile reputation and the most shocking stories are told about him. I know that the police are watching him and that is perhaps the best thing for him if he is not to end like all such men, murdered by apaches,” she went on, for as she thought of Charlus, the memory of Mme de Duras recurred to her, and in the frenzy of her rage she sought to aggravate still further the wounds that she was inflicting on the unfortunate Charlie, and to avenge herself for those that she had received in the course of the evening. “Anyhow, even financially, he can be of no use to you, he is completely ruined since he has become the prey of people who are blackmailing him, and who can’t even make him fork out the price of the tune they call, still less can he pay you for your playing, because everything is heavily mortgaged, hôtel, château, everything.”

Morel was all the more ready to believe this lie since M. de Charlus liked to confide in him his relations with apaches, a race for which the son of a valet, however debauched he may be, professes a feeling of horror as strong as his attachment to Bonapartist principles.

Already, in the cunning mind of Morel, a scheme was beginning to take shape similar to what was called in the eighteenth century the reversal of alliances. Determined never to speak to M. de Charlus again, he would return on the following evening to Jupien’s niece and see that everything was made straight with her. Unfortunately for him this plan was doomed to failure, M. de Charlus having made an appointment for that very evening with Jupien, which the ex-tailor dared not fail to keep in spite of recent events. Other events, as we will see, having occurred regarding Morel, when Jupien in tears told his tale of woe to the baron, the latter, no less wretched, assured him that he would adopt the forsaken girl, that she would

assume one of the titles that were at his disposal, probably that of Mlle d'Oloron, that he would see that she received additional education and married a rich husband. Promises that filled Jupien with joy and left his niece unmoved, for she was still in love with Morel, who, from stupidity or cynicism, used to come into the shop and tease her in Jupien's absence. "What is the matter with you," he would say with a laugh, "with those black circles under your eyes? A broken heart? Yes indeed, the years pass and things change. After all, a man is free to try on a shoe, all the more a woman, and if she doesn't fit him . . ." He lost his temper once only, because she cried, which he considered cowardly, unworthy of her. People are not always very tolerant of the tears that they themselves have provoked.

But we have looked too far ahead, for all this did not happen until after the Verdurins' party, which we have interrupted, and we must go back to the point at which we left off.

"I would never have suspected it," Morel sighed, in answer to Mme Verdurin.

"Naturally people don't say it to your face, that does not prevent your being the talk of the Conservatoire," Mme Verdurin went on wickedly, seeking to make it plain to Morel that it was not only M. de Charlus who was being criticized, but himself also. "I can well believe that you know nothing about it; all the same, people are quite outspoken. Ask Ski what they were saying the other day at Chevillard's concert⁵⁰⁹ within a foot of us when you came into my box. I mean to say, people are pointing you out. As far as I'm concerned, I don't pay the slightest attention, but what I do feel is that it makes a man supremely ridiculous and that he becomes a public laughingstock for the rest of his life."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Charlie in the tone we use to a dentist who has just caused us terrible pain while we tried not to let him see it, or to a too bloodthirsty second who has forced us into a duel on account of some casual remark of which he has said: "You can't swallow that."

"I believe that you have plenty of character, that you are a man," replied Mme Verdurin, "and that you will be capable of speaking out boldly, although he tells everybody that you would never dare, that he has you in his grip."

Charlie, seeking a borrowed dignity in which to cloak the tatters of his own, found in his memory something that he had read or, more probably,

heard quoted, and at once proclaimed: "I wasn't brought up to stomach that sort of thing. This very evening I will break with M. de Charlus. The Queen of Naples has gone, hasn't she? Otherwise, before breaking with him, I would like to ask him . . ." "It isn't necessary to break with him altogether," said Mme Verdurin, anxious to avoid a disruption of the little nucleus. "There is no harm in your seeing him here, among our little group, where you are appreciated, where no one speaks ill of you. But insist upon your freedom, and do not let him drag you about among all those silly women who are friendly to your face; I wish you could have heard what they were saying behind your back. Anyhow, you need feel no regret, not only are you removing a stain that would have marked you for the rest of your life, from the artistic point of view, even if there had not been this scandalous presentation by Charlus, I don't mind telling you that debasing yourself like this in those sham society circles would give the impression that you aren't serious, would earn you the reputation of being an amateur, a little salon performer, which is a terrible thing at your age. I can understand that to all those fine ladies it is highly convenient to be able to return their friends' hospitality by making you come and play for nothing, but it is your future as an artist that would foot the bill. I don't say that you shouldn't go to one or two of them. You mentioned the Queen of Naples—who has left, for she had to go on to another party—now she is a splendid woman, and I don't mind saying that I think she has a poor opinion of Charlus and came here chiefly to please me. Yes, yes, I know she was longing to meet us, M. Verdurin and myself. That is a house in which you might play. And then I'm certain that if I take you—because the artists all know me, you understand, they have always been most obliging to me, and regard me almost as one of themselves, as their Mistress—that is a very different matter. But whatever you do, you must never go near Mme de Duras! Don't go and make a stupid blunder like that! I know several artists who have come here and told me all about her. They know they can trust me," she said, in the sweet and simple tone that she knew how to assume instantly, imparting an appropriate air of modesty to her features, an appropriate charm to her eyes, "they come here, just like that, to tell me all their little troubles; the ones who are said to be most reserved, go on chatting to me sometimes for hours on end and I can't tell you how interesting they are. Poor Chabrier⁵¹⁰ used always to say: 'There's nobody like Mme Verdurin for getting them to talk.' Very well, don't you know, all of them, without

one exception, I have seen them in tears because they had gone to play for Mme de Duras. It is not only the way she enjoys making her servants humiliate them, they could never get an engagement anywhere else again. The agents would say: 'Oh yes, the fellow who plays at Mme de Duras's.' That settled it. There is nothing like that for ruining a man's future. You see, with society people it doesn't seem serious; you may have all the talent in the world, it's a dreadful thing to have to say, but one Mme de Duras is enough to give you the reputation of an amateur. And among artists, don't you know, well, you can ask yourself whether I know them, when I have been moving among them for forty years, launching them, taking an interest in them; very well, when they say that somebody is an amateur, that's the end of it. And people were beginning to say it of you. Indeed, how many times have I been obliged to take up the cudgels, to assure them that you would not play in some absurd drawing room! Do you know what the answer was: 'But he will be forced to go, Charlus won't even consult him, he never asks him for his opinion.' Somebody thought he would pay him a compliment by saying: 'We greatly admire your friend Morel.' Do you know what he said, with that insolent air that you know so well? 'But what do you mean by calling him my friend? We are not of the same class, say rather that he is my creature, my protégé.'"

At this moment there stirred beneath the bulging brow of the musical deity the one thing that certain people cannot keep to themselves, a word that is not merely abject but imprudent to repeat. But the need to repeat it is stronger than honor, than prudence. It was to this need that, after a few convulsive movements of her spherical and sorrowful brow, the Mistress succumbed: "Someone actually told my husband that he had said 'my servant,' but for that I cannot vouch," she added. It was a similar need that had compelled M. de Charlus, shortly after he had sworn to Morel that nobody would ever know the story of his birth, to say to Mme Verdurin: "His father was a valet." A similar need again, now that the word had been released, would make it circulate from one person to another, each of whom would confide it under the seal of a secrecy that would be promised and not kept by the hearer, as by the informant himself. These words would end, as in the game called ferret,⁵¹¹ by being traced back to Mme Verdurin, bringing down upon her the wrath of the person concerned, who would at last have learned the truth. She knew this, but could not repress the words that were burning her tongue. The word "servant" was bound to offend

Morel. She said “servant” nevertheless, and if she added that she could not vouch for the word, this was so as to appear certain of the rest, thanks to this hint of uncertainty, and to show her impartiality. This impartiality that she showed, she herself found so touching that she began to speak affectionately to Charlie: “For, don’t you see,” she went on, “I am not blaming him, he is dragging you down into his abyss, it is true, but it is not his fault, since he wallows in it himself, since he wallows in it,” she repeated in a louder tone, having been struck by the aptness of the image that had taken shape so quickly that her attention only now overtook it and was trying to give it prominence. “No, what I do reproach him for,” she said in a melting tone—like a woman drunk with her own success—“is a want of delicacy toward yourself. There are certain things that one does not say in public. Well, this evening, he was betting that he would make you blush with joy by telling you (stuff and nonsense, of course, for his recommendation would be enough to prevent your getting it) that you were to have the cross of the Légion d’honneur. Even that I could overlook, although I have never quite liked,” she went on with a delicate, dignified air, “hearing a person make a fool of his friends, but, don’t you know, there are certain little things that one does resent. Such as when he told us, with screams of laughter, that if you want the cross it’s to please your father⁵¹² and that your father was a flunky.”

“He told you that!” cried Charlie, believing, on the strength of those adroitly interpolated words, in the truth of everything that Mme Verdurin had said. Mme Verdurin was overwhelmed with the joy of an old mistress who, just as her young lover was on the point of deserting her, has succeeded in breaking off his marriage, and it is possible that she had not calculated her lie, that she was not even consciously lying. A sort of sentimental logic, something perhaps more elementary still, a sort of nervous reflex urging her, in order to brighten her life and preserve her happiness, to stir up trouble in the little clan, may have brought impulsively to her lips, without giving her time to check their veracity, these assertions diabolically effective if not rigorously accurate.

“If he had only repeated it to us, it wouldn’t matter,” the Mistress went on, “we know better than to listen to what he says; besides, what does a man’s origin matter, you have your own value, you are what you make yourself, but that he should use it to make Mme de Portefin laugh” (Mme Verdurin named this lady on purpose because she knew that Charlie

admired her), “that is what distresses us. My husband said to me when he heard him: ‘I would sooner he had struck me in the face.’ For he is as fond of you as I am, don’t you know, is Gustave” (from this we learned that M. Verdurin’s name was Gustave). “He is really very sensitive.”

“But I never told you I was fond of him,” muttered M. Verdurin, acting the kindhearted curmudgeon. “It is Charlus who is fond of him.”

“Oh, no! Now I realize the difference, I was betrayed by a scoundrel and you, you are good,” Charlie exclaimed in all sincerity.

“No, no,” murmured Mme Verdurin, seeking to retain her victory (for she felt that her Wednesdays were safe) but not to abuse it: “scoundrel is too strong; he does harm, a great deal of harm, unwittingly; you know that tale about the Légion d’honneur was the affair of a moment. And it would be painful to me to repeat all that he said about your family,” said Mme Verdurin, who would have been greatly embarrassed had she been asked to do so.

“Oh, even if it only took a moment, it proves that he is a traitor,” cried Morel.

It was at this moment that we returned to the drawing room. “Ah!” exclaimed M. de Charlus when he saw that Morel was in the room, advancing upon the musician with the alacrity of the man who has skillfully organized a whole evening’s entertainment with a view to an assignation with a woman, and in his excitement never imagines that he has with his own hands set the snare in which he will presently be caught and publicly thrashed by men stationed in readiness by her husband: “Well, after all, it is none too soon. Are you happy, young glory, and presently young knight of the Légion d’honneur? For very soon you will be able to sport your cross,” M. de Charlus said to Morel with a tender and triumphant air, but by the very mention of the decoration endorsed Mme Verdurin’s lies, which appeared to Morel to be indisputable truth.

“Leave me alone, I forbid you to come near me,” Morel shouted at the baron. “You know what I mean, all right, I’m not the first young man you’ve tried to corrupt!”

My sole consolation lay in the thought that I was about to see Morel and the Verdurins pulverized by M. de Charlus. For a thousand times less than that I had been visited with his furious rage,⁵¹³ no one was safe from it, a king would not have intimidated him. Instead of which, an extraordinary thing happened. One saw M. de Charlus speechless, dumbfounded,

measuring the depths of his misery without understanding its cause, finding not a word to utter, raising his eyes to stare at each of the company in turn, with a questioning, outraged, suppliant air, which seemed to be asking them not so much what had happened as what answer he ought to make. Perhaps what struck him speechless was—when he saw that M. and Mme Verdurin turned their eyes from him and that no one was coming to his rescue—his anguish at the moment and, still more, his dread of greater anguish to come; or else that, not having lost his temper in advance, in imagination, and forged his thunderbolt, not having his rage ready as a weapon in his hand (for, sensitive, neurotic, hysterical, his impulses were genuine, but his courage was a sham; indeed, as I had always thought, and this was what made me like him, his malice was a sham also; and he did not show the normal reactions of an outraged man of honor), he had been seized and struck down suddenly at a moment when he was unarmed; or else that, in a milieu that was not his own, he felt himself less at ease and less courageous than he would have been in the Faubourg. The fact remains that, in this salon that he despised, this grand seigneur (in whom his sense of superiority to commoners was no less essentially inherent than it had been in any of his ancestors who had stood in anguish before the Revolutionary Tribunal) could do nothing, in a paralysis of all his limbs and his tongue, but cast in every direction glances of terror, outraged by the violence that had been done to him, no less suppliant than questioning. And yet M. de Charlus possessed all the resources, not merely of eloquence but of audacity, when, seized by a rage that had long been simmering against someone, he reduced him to despair with the cruelest words, in front of a shocked society that had never imagined anyone could go so far. M. de Charlus, on these occasions, burned, convulsed with a sort of nervous frenzy that left everyone trembling. But in these instances he had the initiative, he launched the attack, he said whatever came into his mind (just as Bloch was able to make fun of Jews and blushed if the word “Jew” was uttered in his hearing). These people whom he hated, he hated because he thought they despised him. Had they shown him consideration, instead of becoming drunk with rage with them he would have embraced them. In a situation so cruelly unforeseen, this great talker could do no more than stammer: “What does it all mean? What has happened?” His question was not even heard. And the eternal pantomime of panic terror has so little altered, that this elderly gentleman, to whom a disagreeable incident had just occurred in a Parisian

drawing room, unconsciously repeated the various formal attitudes in which the Greek sculptors of the earliest times symbolized the terror of nymphs pursued by the god Pan.⁵¹⁴

The ambassador who has been recalled, the undersecretary placed suddenly on the retired list, the man about town whom people have begun to cut, the lover who has been shown the door examine sometimes for months on end the event that has shattered their hopes; they turn it over and over like a projectile fired at them they know not whence or by whom, almost as though it were a meteorite. They would truly like to know the elements that compose this strange explosive that has burst upon them, learn what hostilities may be detected in them. Chemists have at least the power of analysis; sick men suffering from a malady the origin of which they do not know can send for the doctor; criminal mysteries are more or less solved by the prosecuting attorney. But when it comes to the disconcerting actions of our fellow men, we rarely discover their motives. Thus M. de Charlus, to anticipate the days that followed this party to which we will presently return, could see in Charlie's attitude one thing alone that was self-evident. Charlie, who had often threatened the baron that he would tell people of the passion that he inspired in him, must have seized the opportunity to do so when he considered that he had now sufficiently "arrived" to be able to stand on his own two feet. And he must, out of sheer ingratitude, have told Mme Verdurin everything. But how had she allowed herself to be taken in (for the baron, having made up his mind to deny the story, had already persuaded himself that the sentiments for which he was blamed were imaginary)? Some friends of Mme Verdurin, who themselves perhaps felt a passion for Charlie, must have prepared the ground. Accordingly, M. de Charlus during the next few days wrote terrifying letters to a number of the faithful, who were entirely innocent and concluded that he must be mad; then he went to Mme Verdurin with a long and moving tale, which had not at all the effect that he desired. For in the first place Mme Verdurin repeated to the baron: "All you need do is not to bother about him, treat him with scorn, he is a mere boy." Now the baron longed only for a reconciliation. In the second place, to bring this about by depriving Charlie of everything of which he had felt himself assured, he asked Mme Verdurin not to invite him again; a request that she met with a refusal that brought upon her angry and sarcastic letters from M. de Charlus. Flitting from one supposition to another, the baron never arrived at

the truth, which was that the blow had not come from Morel. It is true that he might have learned this by asking him for a few minutes' conversation. But he felt that this would injure his dignity and would be against the interests of his love. He had been insulted; he awaited an explanation. There is, for that matter, almost invariably, attached to the idea of a conversation that might clear up a misunderstanding, another idea that, whatever the reason, prevents us from agreeing to that conversation. The man who has abased himself and shown his weakness on a score of occasions, will furnish proofs of pride on the twenty-first, the only occasion on which it would serve him not to persist in an arrogant attitude but to dispel an error that will take root in his adversary failing a denial. As for the social side of the incident, the rumor spread that M. de Charlus had been turned out of the Verdurins' house at the moment when he was attempting to rape a young musician. The effect of this rumor was that nobody was surprised when M. de Charlus did not appear again at the Verdurins', and whenever he happened by chance to meet, anywhere else, one of the faithful whom he had suspected and insulted, since this person bore a grudge against the baron, who himself abstained from greeting him, people were not surprised, realizing that no member of the little clan would ever wish to speak to the baron again.

While M. de Charlus, momentarily stunned by Morel's words and by the attitude of the Mistress, stood there in the pose of the nymph in the grip of Panic terror, M. and Mme Verdurin had retired to the outer drawing room, as a sign of diplomatic rupture, leaving M. de Charlus by himself, while on the platform Morel was putting his violin in its case. "Now you must tell us exactly what happened," Mme Verdurin said avidly to her husband.

"I don't know what you can have said to him, he looked quite upset," said Ski, "there were tears in his eyes."

Pretending not to have understood: "I'm sure nothing that I said could make any difference to him," said Mme Verdurin, employing one of those stratagems that deceive no one, so as to force the sculptor to repeat that Charlie was in tears, tears that filled the Mistress with too much pride for her to be willing to run the risk that one or other of the faithful, who might not have heard what was said, remained in ignorance of them.

"No, it has made a difference, for I saw big tears glistening in his eyes," said the sculptor in a low tone with a smile of malicious connivance, and a sidelong glance to make sure that Morel was still on the platform and could

not overhear the conversation. But there was somebody who did overhear, and whose presence, as soon as it was observed, was to restore to Morel one of the hopes that he had forfeited. This was the Queen of Naples, who, having left her fan behind, had thought it more polite, on coming away from another party to which she had gone on, to call for it in person. She had entered the room quite quietly, as though she were a little embarrassed, prepared to make apologies for her presence, and to pay a little call on her hostess now that all the other guests had gone. But no one had heard her come in, in the heat of the incident the meaning of which she had at once gathered, and which set her ablaze with indignation.

“Ski says that he had tears in his eyes, did you notice that? I did not see any tears. Ah, yes, I remember now,” she corrected herself, in the fear that her denial might not be believed. “As for Charlus, he’s distraught, he ought to take a chair, he’s tottering on his feet, he’ll be on the floor in another minute,” she said with a pitiless laugh.

At that moment Morel hastened toward her: “Isn’t that lady the Queen of Naples?” he asked (although he knew quite well that she was), pointing to the sovereign who was making her way toward Charlus. “After what has just happened, I can no longer, I’m afraid, ask the baron to introduce me.”

“Wait, I will take you to her myself,” said Mme Verdurin, and, followed by a few of the faithful, but not by myself and Brichot who made haste to go and call for our hats and coats, she advanced upon the queen, who was chatting with M. de Charlus. He had imagined that the fulfillment of his great desire that Morel should be presented to the Queen of Naples could be prevented only by the improbable demise of that lady. But we picture the future as a reflection of the present projected into empty space, whereas it is the result, often almost immediate, of causes that for the most part escape our notice. Not an hour had passed, and now M. de Charlus would have given everything he possessed to prevent Morel from being presented to the queen. Mme Verdurin made the queen a curtsy. Seeing that the other appeared not to recognize her: “I am Mme Verdurin. Your Majesty does not remember me.”

“Quite well,” said the queen as she continued so naturally to converse with M. de Charlus and with an air of such complete indifference that Mme Verdurin doubted whether it was to herself that this “Quite well” had been addressed, uttered with a marvelously detached intonation, which wrung from M. de Charlus, despite his broken heart, a smile of expert and

delighted appreciation of the art of impertinence. Morel, who had watched from a distance the preparations for his presentation, now approached. The queen offered her arm to M. de Charlus. With him, too, she was vexed, but only because he did not make a more energetic stand against vile detractors. She was crimson with shame for him whom the Verdurins dared to treat in this fashion. The entirely simple civility that she had shown them a few hours earlier, and the arrogant pride with which she now stood up to face them, had their source in the same region of her heart. The queen was a woman of great kindness, but who regarded kindness first and foremost in the form of an unshakable attachment to the people whom she liked, to her own family, to all the princes of her race, among whom was M. de Charlus, and, after them, to all the people of the middle classes or of the humblest populace who knew how to respect those whom she loved and felt well-disposed toward them. It was as to a woman endowed with these sound instincts that she had shown kindness to Mme Verdurin. And, no doubt, this is a narrow conception, somewhat Tory,⁵¹⁵ and increasingly obsolete, of kindness. But this does not mean that her kindness was any less genuine or ardent. The ancients were no less strongly attached to the human group to which they devoted themselves because it did not exceed the limits of their city, nor are the men of today to their country than those who in the future will love the United States of the World. In my own immediate surroundings, I have had an example of this in my mother, whom Mme de Cambremer and Mme de Guermantes could never persuade to take part in any philanthropic undertaking, to join any patriotic workroom, to sell or to be a patroness at any bazaar. I do not go so far as to say that she was right in doing good only when her heart had first spoken, and in reserving for her own family, for her servants, for the unfortunate whom chance brought her way, her treasures of love and generosity, but I do know that these, like those of my grandmother, were unbounded and exceeded by far anything that Mme de Guermantes or Mme de Cambremer ever could have done or did. The case of the Queen of Naples was altogether different, but even here it must be admitted that her conception of deserving people was not at all that set forth in those novels of Dostoyevsky that Albertine had taken from my shelves and devoured, that is to say in the guise of wheedling parasites, thieves, drunkards, at one moment pliant, at another insolent, debauchees, even murderers. Extremes, however, meet, since the noble man, the close relative, the outraged kinsman whom the queen sought to defend, was M. de

Charlus, that is to say, notwithstanding his birth and all the family ties that bound him to the queen, a man whose virtue was hemmed in by many vices. "You do not look at all well, my dear cousin," she said to M. de Charlus. "Lean on my arm. You may be sure that it will always support you. It is strong enough for that." Then, raising her eyes proudly in front of her (at that moment, Ski told me, there were in front of her Mme Verdurin and Morel), "You know that already, in the past, at Gaeta, it held the mob at bay. It will be able to serve you as a rampart." And it was thus, taking the baron on her arm and without having allowed Morel to be presented to her, that the glorious sister of the Empress Élisabeth left the house.

One might have thought, in view of M. de Charlus's ferocious temper and the persecutions with which he terrorized even his own family, that he would, after the events of this evening, let loose his fury and take reprisals upon the Verdurins. Nothing of the sort occurred, and the principal reason was certainly that the baron, having caught cold a few days later, and contracted septic pneumonia, which was rife that winter, was for long regarded by his doctors, and regarded himself, as being at the point of death and lay for many months suspended between it and life. Was there simply a physical metastasis, and the substitution of a different malady for the neurosis that had previously made him lose all control of himself in his outbursts of rage? For it is too simple to suppose that, having never taken the Verdurins seriously, from the social point of view, but having come at last to understand the part that they had played, he was unable to feel the resentment that he would have felt for any of his equals; too simple also to remember that neurotics, irritated on the slightest provocation by imaginary and inoffensive enemies, become on the contrary inoffensive as soon as anyone takes the offensive against them, and that we can calm them more easily by flinging cold water in their faces than by attempting to prove to them the inanity of their grievances. But it is probably not in a physical metastasis that we ought to seek the explanation of this absence of rancor, but far more in the malady itself. It exhausted the baron so completely that he had little leisure left in which to think about the Verdurins. He was almost moribund. We mentioned offensives; even those that have only a posthumous effect require, if we are to "stage" them properly, the sacrifice of a part of our strength. M. de Charlus had too little strength left for the activity of a preparation. We hear often of mortal enemies who open their eyes to gaze upon one another in the hour of death and close them again,

content. This must be a rare occurrence, except when death surprises us in the midst of life. It is, on the contrary, at the moment when we have nothing left to lose, that we will not burden ourselves with the risks that, when full of life, we would lightly have undertaken. The spirit of vengeance forms part of life, it abandons us as a rule—notwithstanding certain exceptions that, occurring in the heart of the same person, are, as we will see, human contradictions—on the threshold of death. After having thought for a moment about the Verdurins, M. de Charlus felt that he was too weak, turned his face to the wall and ceased to think about anything. It was not that he had lost his eloquence, but it required less effort. It still flowed from its source, but it had changed. Detached from the violence that it had so often adorned, it was now a quasi-mystical eloquence, embellished with words of meekness, parables from the Gospel, an apparent resignation to death. He talked especially on the days when he thought that he would live. A relapse made him silent. This Christian meekness into which his splendid violence was transposed (as is into *Esther* the so different genius of *Andromaque*)⁵¹⁶ provoked the admiration of those who came to his bedside. It would have provoked that of the Verdurins themselves, who could not have helped adoring a man whose weaknesses had made them hate him. It is true that thoughts that were Christian only in appearance rose to the surface. He implored the Archangel Gabriel to appear and announce to him, as to the Prophet, precisely when the Messiah would come to him.⁵¹⁷ And, breaking off with a sweet and sorrowful smile, he would add: “But the Archangel must not ask me, as he asked Daniel, to have patience for ‘seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks,’ for I would be dead before then.”⁵¹⁸ The person whom he awaited thus was Morel. And so he asked the Archangel Raphael to bring Morel, as he had brought the young Tobias. And, introducing more human methods (like sick popes who, while ordering masses to be said, do not neglect to send for their doctors), he insinuated to his visitors that if Brichot were to bring him without delay his young Tobias, perhaps the Archangel Raphael would consent to restore Brichot’s sight, as he had done to the father of Tobias, or as had happened in the purifying pool of Bethesda.⁵¹⁹ But, notwithstanding these human lapses, the moral purity of M. de Charlus’s conversation had nonetheless become delightful. Vanity, slander, the insanity of malice and pride, had alike disappeared. Morally M. de Charlus had been raised far above the

level at which he had lived in the past. But this moral perfection, as to the reality of which his oratorical art was for that matter capable of deceiving more than one of his compassionate audience, this perfection vanished with the malady that had labored on its behalf. M. de Charlus redescended the downward slope with a rapidity that, as we will see, continued steadily to increase. But the Verdurins' attitude toward him was by that time no more than a somewhat distant memory that more immediate outbursts prevented from reviving.

To turn back to the Verdurins' party, when the host and hostess were by themselves, M. Verdurin said to his wife: "You know where Cottard has gone? He is with Saniette: he has been speculating on the Stock Exchange to recover his losses and has failed. When he got home just now after leaving us and learned that he hadn't a centime in the world and nearly a million francs of debts, Saniette had a stroke."

"But then, why did he gamble? It's idiotic, he was the last person in the world to succeed at that game. Cleverer men than he get plucked at it, and he was born to let himself be swindled by anyone who comes along."

"Why, of course, we have always known that he was an idiot," said M. Verdurin. "Anyhow, this is the result. Here you have a man who will be turned out of house and home tomorrow by his landlord, who is going to find himself reduced to poverty; his relatives don't like him, Forcheville is the last man in the world to do anything for him. And so it occurred to me, I don't wish to do anything that doesn't meet with your approval, but we might perhaps be able to scrape up a small income for him so that he won't be too conscious of his ruin, so that he can keep a roof over his head."

"I entirely agree with you, it is very good of you to have thought of it. But you say 'a roof'; the imbecile has kept on an apartment beyond his means, he can't remain in it, we will have to find him a couple of rooms somewhere. I understand that at the present moment he is still paying six or seven thousand francs for his apartment."

"Six thousand, five hundred. But he is greatly attached to his home. In short, he has had his first stroke, he can scarcely live more than two or three years. Suppose we were to allow him ten thousand francs for three years. It seems to me that we should be able to afford that. We might for example this year, instead of taking La Raspelière again, get hold of something on a simpler scale. With our income, it seems to me that to sacrifice ten thousand francs a year for three years is not out of the question."

“Very well, there’s only the nuisance that people will get to know about it, and we will be expected to do it again for others.”

“Believe me, I have thought about that. I will do it only upon the express condition that nobody knows anything about it. Thank you, I have no desire that we should become the benefactors of the human race. No philanthropy! What we might do is to tell him that the money has been left to him by Princess Sherbatoff.”

“But will he believe it? She consulted Cottard about her will.”

“If worse comes to worst, we might take Cottard into our confidence, he is used to professional secrecy, he makes an enormous amount of money, he won’t be like one of those busybodies to whom one is obliged to pay hush money. He may even be willing to say, perhaps, that it was himself that the princess appointed as her executor. In that way we wouldn’t even appear. That would avoid all the nuisance of scenes, and gratitude, and speeches.” M. Verdurin added an expression that made quite plain the kind of touching scenes and speeches that they were anxious to avoid. But it cannot have been reported to me correctly, for it was not a French expression, but one of those terms that are to be found in certain families to denote certain things, annoying things especially, probably because people wish to indicate them in the hearing of the persons concerned without being understood. An expression of this sort is generally a survival from an earlier condition of the family. In a Jewish family, for example, it will be a ritual term diverted from its true meaning, and perhaps the only Hebrew word with which the family, now thoroughly French, is still acquainted. In a family that is strongly provincial, it will be a term in the local dialect, although the family no longer speaks or even understands that dialect. In a family that has come from South America and no longer speaks anything but French, it will be a Spanish word. And, in the next generation, the word will no longer exist save as a childhood memory. They may remember quite well that their parents while dining used to allude to the servants who were serving at the table, without being understood by them, by employing some such word, but the children cannot tell exactly what the word meant, whether it was Spanish, Hebrew, German, dialect, if indeed it ever belonged to any language and was not a proper name or a word entirely made up. The uncertainty can be cleared up only if they have a great-uncle, an elderly cousin still surviving who must have used the same expression. Since I never knew any relative of the Verdurins, I have never been able to

reconstruct the word. In any case, it must have drawn a smile from Mme Verdurin, for the use of this language less general, more personal, more secret, than their everyday speech inspires in those who use it among themselves a sense of self-importance that is always accompanied by a certain satisfaction. After this moment of mirth: "But if Cottard talks," Mme Verdurin objected.

"He will not talk."

He did mention it, to myself at least, for it was from him that I learned of this incident a few years later, actually at the funeral of Saniette. I was sorry that I had not known of it earlier. For one thing the knowledge would have brought me more rapidly to the idea that we ought never to feel resentment toward other people, ought never to judge them by some memory of an unkind action, for we do not know all the good that, at other moments, their hearts may have sincerely desired and realized. And thus, even from the simple point of view of prediction, we are mistaken. For no doubt the evil aspect that we have noted once and for all will recur, but the heart is far richer than that, has many other aspects that will recur also to these people, whose kindness we refuse to admit because of the occasion on which they behaved badly. But for a more personal point of view, this revelation by Cottard must inevitably have had an effect upon me, because by altering my opinion of the Verdurins, this revelation, had it been made to me earlier, would have dispelled the suspicions that I had formed as to the part that the Verdurins might be playing between Albertine and me, would have dispelled them, wrongly perhaps as it happened, for if M. Verdurin had certain virtues, he nevertheless teased to the point of the most savage persecution, and so jealous of his domination over the little clan as not to shrink from the basest falsehoods, from the fomentation of the most unjustified hatreds, in order to sever any ties among the faithful that did not have as their sole object the strengthening of the little group. He was a man capable of disinterested action, of unostentatious generosity, that does not necessarily mean a man of feeling, nor a likable man, nor a scrupulous, nor a truthful, nor always a good man. A partial goodness, in which there subsisted, perhaps, a trace of the family whom my great-aunt had known,^{[520](#)} probably existed in him before I discovered it through this action, as America or the North Pole existed before Columbus or Peary.^{[521](#)} Nevertheless, at the moment of my discovery, M. Verdurin's nature offered me a new and unimagined aspect; and so I am brought up against the

difficulty of presenting a fixed image as well of a character as of societies and passions. For a character changes no less than they, and if we try to take a snapshot of what is relatively immutable in it, we see it present in succession different aspects (implying that it cannot remain immobile but keeps moving) to the disconcerted lens.

Seeing how late it was, and fearing that Albertine might be growing impatient, I asked Brichot, as we left the Verdurins' party, to be so kind as to drop me at my door. My carriage would then take him home. He commended me for going straight home like this (unaware that a girl was waiting for me in the house) and for ending so early, and so wisely, an evening of which, on the contrary, all that I had done was to postpone the actual beginning. Then he spoke to me about M. de Charlus. The latter would doubtless have been stupefied had he heard the professor, who was so amiable to him, the professor who always assured him: "I never repeat anything," speaking of him and of his life without the slightest reserve. And Brichot's indignant amazement would perhaps have been no less sincere if M. de Charlus had said to him: "I am told that you have been speaking ill of me." Brichot did indeed have an affection for M. de Charlus and, if he had had to call to mind some conversation that had turned upon him, would have been far more likely to remember the friendly feelings that he had had for the baron, while he said the same things about him that everyone was saying, than to remember those things themselves. He would not have thought that he was lying if he had said: "I who speak of you in so friendly a spirit," since he did feel a friendly spirit while he was speaking of M. de Charlus. The baron had above all for Brichot the charm that the professor demanded before everything else in his social life, and which was that of furnishing real examples of what he had long supposed to be an invention of the poets. Brichot, who had often expounded the second *Eclogue* of Virgil⁵²² without really knowing whether its fiction had any basis in reality, found later on in conversing with Charlus some of the pleasure that he knew his masters, M. Mérimée and M. Renan, his colleague M. Maspero⁵²³ had felt, when traveling in Spain, Palestine, and Egypt, on recognizing in the scenery and the contemporary peoples of Spain, Palestine, and Egypt the setting and the invariable actors of the ancient scenes that they themselves had expounded in their books.

“Be it said without offense to that knight of noble lineage,” Brichot declared to me in the carriage that was taking us home, “he is simply prodigious when he illustrates his satanic catechism with a distinctly Bedlamite⁵²⁴ verve and the persistence, I was going to say the candor, of a *blanc d’Espagne*⁵²⁵ and an *émigré*. I can assure you, if I dare express myself like Mgr. d’Hulst,⁵²⁶ I am by no means bored on the days when I receive a visit from that feudal lord who, seeking to defend Adonis against our age of miscreants, has followed the instincts of his race, and, in all sodomist innocence, has gone crusading.”

I listened to Brichot, and I was not alone with him. As, for that matter, I had never ceased to feel since I left home that evening, I felt myself, in however obscure a fashion, tied fast to the girl who was at that moment in her room. Even when I was talking to someone or other at the Verdurins’, I had in some way felt that she was by my side, I had that vague impression of her that we have of our own limbs, and if I happened to think of her it was as we think, with annoyance at being bound to it in complete subjection, of our own body.

“And what a fund of scandal,” Brichot went on, “sufficient to supply all the appendices of the *Causeries du Lundi*,⁵²⁷ is the conversation of that apostle! Imagine that I have learned from him that the treatise on ethics that I had always admired as the most splendid moral composition of our age was inspired in our venerable colleague X by a young telegraph messenger. Let’s acknowledge that my eminent friend omitted to give us the name of this ephebe in the course of his demonstrations. He has shown in so doing more human respect, or, if you prefer, less gratitude, than Phidias who inscribed the name of the athlete whom he loved upon the ring of his Olympian Zeus.⁵²⁸ The baron had not heard this last story. Needless to say, it appealed to his orthodox mind. You can readily imagine that whenever I have to discuss with my colleague a doctoral candidate’s thesis, I find in his dialectic, which for that matter is extremely subtle, the additional savor that spicy revelations added, for Sainte-Beuve, to the insufficiently confidential writings of Chateaubriand.⁵²⁹ From our colleague, whose wisdom is golden but who had little money, the telegraph boy passed into the hands of the baron, ‘with the most honorable of intentions’⁵³⁰ (you should have heard his voice when he said it). And as this Satan is the most obliging of men, he has found his protégé a post in the colonies, from which the young man,

who has a sense of gratitude, sends him from time to time the most excellent fruit. The baron offers these to his distinguished friends; some of the young man's pineapples appeared quite recently on the table at quai Conti, drawing from Mme Verdurin, who at that moment put no malice into her words: 'You must have an uncle or a nephew in America, M. de Charlus, to get pineapples like these!' I admit that if I had known the truth then I would have eaten them with a certain gaiety, repeating to myself *in petto*⁵³¹ the opening lines of an ode of Horace that Diderot loved to recall.⁵³² In fact, like my colleague Boissier, strolling from the Palatine to Tibur,⁵³³ I derive from the baron's conversation a singularly more vivid and more savory idea of the writers of the Augustan age.⁵³⁴ Let us not even speak of those of the Decadence, nor let us hark back to the Greeks, although I once said to that excellent baron that in his company I felt like Plato in the house of Aspasia.⁵³⁵ To tell the truth, I had considerably enlarged the scale of the two characters and, as La Fontaine says, my example was taken 'from smaller animals.'⁵³⁶ However it may be, you do not, I imagine, suppose that the baron took offense. Never have I seen him so ingenuously delighted. A childish excitement made him depart from his aristocratic phlegm. 'What flatterers all these Sorbonnards are!' he exclaimed with rapture. 'To think that I should have had to wait until my age before being compared to Aspasia! An old fright like me! Oh, my youth!' I would like you to have seen him as he said that, outrageously powdered as he always is, and, at his age, scented like a young coxcomb. All the same, beneath his genealogical obsessions, the best fellow in the world. For all these reasons, I would be distressed were this evening's rupture to prove final. What did surprise me was the way in which the young man turned on him. His manner toward the baron has been, for some time past, that of a henchman, of a feudal vassal, which scarcely betokened such an insurrection. I hope that, in any event, even if (*Dii omen avertant*)⁵³⁷ the baron were never to return to quai Conti, this schism will not extend to me. Each of us derives too much benefit from the exchange that we make of my feeble stock of learning with his experience." (We will see that if M. de Charlus, after having hoped in vain that Brichot would bring Morel back to him, showed no violent rancor toward Brichot, at any rate his affection for the professor vanished so completely as to allow him to judge him without any indulgence.) "And I swear to you that the

exchange is so much in my favor that when the baron yields up to me what his life has taught him, I am unable to endorse the opinion of Sylvestre Bonnard that a library is still the best place in which to ponder the dream of life.”[538](#)

We had now reached my door. I got out of the carriage to give the driver Brichot’s address. From the pavement, I could see the window of Albertine’s room, that window, formerly quite black at night when she was not staying in the house, which the electric light from inside, segmented by the slats of the shutters, striped from top to bottom with parallel bars of gold. This magic scroll, clear as it was to myself, tracing before my tranquil mind precise images, near at hand, of which I would presently be taking possession, was completely invisible to Brichot, who had remained in the carriage, almost blind, and would moreover have been completely incomprehensible to him could he have seen it, since, like the friends who called on me before dinner, when Albertine had returned from her drive, the professor was unaware that a girl who was all my own was waiting for me in a bedroom adjoining mine. The carriage drove off. I remained for a moment alone on the pavement. To be sure, these luminous rays that I could see from below and which to anyone else would have seemed merely superficial, I endowed with the utmost consistency, plenitude, solidity, in view of all the significance that I placed behind them, in a treasure unsuspected by the rest of the world that I had concealed there and from which those horizontal rays emanated, a treasure if you like, but a treasure in exchange for which I had forfeited my freedom, my solitude, my thought. If Albertine had not been there, and indeed if I had merely been in search of pleasure, I would have gone to demand it of unknown women, into whose life I would have attempted to penetrate, at Venice perhaps, or at least in some corner of nocturnal Paris. But now all that I had to do when the time came for me to receive caresses, was not to set forth on a journey, was not even to leave my own house, but to return there. And to return there not to find myself alone, and, after taking leave of the friends who furnished me from outside with food for thought, to find myself at any rate compelled to seek it in myself, but to be on the contrary less alone than when I was at the Verdurins’, welcomed as I would be by the person to whom I abdicated, to whom I handed over most completely my own person, without having for an instant the leisure to think of myself nor even requiring the effort, since she would be by my side, to think of her. So that as I raised my eyes to look

one last time from outside at the window of the room in which I would presently find myself, I seemed to behold the luminous gates that were about to close behind me and of which I myself had forged, for an eternal slavery, the inflexible bars of gold.

Albertine had never told me that she suspected me of being jealous of her, preoccupied with everything that she did. The only words—and that, I must add, was long ago—that we had exchanged with regard to jealousy seemed to prove the opposite. I remembered that, on a fine moonlight evening, toward the beginning of our intimacy, on one of the first occasions when I had accompanied her home, and when I would have been just as glad not to do so and to leave her in order to run after other girls, I had said to her: “You know, if I am offering to take you home, it is not from jealousy; if you have anything else to do, I will slip discreetly away.” And she had replied: “Oh, I know quite well that you aren’t jealous and that it’s all the same to you, but I’ve nothing else to do except to stay with you.” Another occasion was at La Raspelière, when M. de Charlus, not without casting a covert glance at Morel, had made a display of friendly gallantry toward Albertine; I had said to her: “Well, he gave you a good hug, I hope.” And as I had added half ironically: “I suffered all the torments of jealousy,” Albertine, employing the language proper either to the vulgar class from which she sprang or to that other, more vulgar still, which she frequented, replied: “What a joker you are! I know quite well you’re not jealous. For one thing, you told me so, and besides, it’s perfectly obvious, get along with you!” She had never told me since then that she had changed her mind; but there must all the same have developed in her, on that subject, a number of new ideas, which she concealed from me but which an accident might, in spite of her, betray, for that evening when, having returned, after going to find her in her room and taking her to mine, I had said to her (with a certain awkwardness that I did not myself understand, for I had indeed told Albertine that I was going to pay a call, and had said that I did not know where, perhaps on Mme de Villeparisis, perhaps on Mme de Guermantes, perhaps on Mme de Cambremer; it is true that I had not actually mentioned the Verdurins): “Guess where I have been, at the Verdurins’,” I had barely had time to utter the words before Albertine, a look of utter consternation upon her face, had answered me in words that seemed to explode of their own accord with a force that she was unable to contain: “I thought as much.”

“I didn’t know that you would be annoyed by my going to see the Verdurins.” (It is true that she did not tell me that she was annoyed, but that was obvious. It is true also that I had not said to myself that she would be annoyed. And yet in the face of the explosion of her wrath, as in the face of those events that a sort of retrospective second sight makes us imagine that we have already experienced in the past, it seemed to me that I could never have expected anything else.)

“Annoyed? What do you suppose I care, where you’ve been. It’s all the same to me. Wasn’t Mlle Vinteuil supposed to be there?”

Losing all control of myself at these words: “You never told me that you had met Mme Verdurin the other day,” I said to her, to show her that I was better informed than she knew.

“Did I meet her?” she inquired with a pensive air, addressing at once herself as though she were seeking to collect her fugitive memories and me as though it was I who could have told her of the meeting; and no doubt in order that I might say what I knew, perhaps also in order to gain time before making a difficult answer. But I was much less preoccupied with the thought of Mlle Vinteuil than with a fear that had already crossed my mind but that now gripped me more forcefully. I had supposed that Mme Verdurin had purely and simply invented, to enhance her own renown, the story of her having expected Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, so that on returning home I was quite calm. Albertine, merely by saying: “Wasn’t Mlle Vinteuil supposed to be there?” had shown me that I had not been mistaken in my original suspicion; but anyhow my mind was set at rest in that quarter for the future, since by giving up her plan of visiting the Verdurins, Albertine had sacrificed Mlle Vinteuil for me.

“Besides,” I said to her angrily, “there are plenty of other things that you hide from me, even the most trivial things, such as for example when you went for three days to Balbec, I mention it in passing.” I had added the words “I mention it in passing” as a complement to “even the most trivial things” so that if Albertine said to me “What was there wrong about my trip to Balbec?” I might be able to answer: “Why, I’ve quite forgotten. I get so confused about the things people tell me, I attach so little importance to them!” And indeed if I referred to those three days that she had spent on an excursion with the chauffeur to Balbec, from where her postcards had reached me after so long a delay, I referred to them purely at random and regretted that I had chosen so bad an example, for in fact, as they had barely

had time to go there and return, it was certainly the one excursion in which there had not even been time for the interpolation of a meeting at all protracted with anybody. But Albertine supposed, from what I had just said, that I was fully aware of the real facts, and had merely concealed my knowledge from her. She had been convinced, for some time past, that, in one way or another, I was having her followed, or in short was somehow or other, as she had said the week before to Andrée, better informed than herself about her own life. And so she interrupted me with a wholly unnecessary admission, for certainly I suspected nothing of what she now told me, and I was on the other hand appalled, so vast can the disparity be between the truth that a liar has disguised and the idea which, from her lies, the man who is in love with the liar has formed of that truth. Scarcely had I uttered the words: "When you went for three days to Balbec, I mention it in passing," before Albertine, cutting me short, declared to me as something quite natural: "You mean to say that I never went to Balbec at all? Of course I didn't! And I have always wondered why you pretended to believe that I had. All the same, there was no harm in it. The driver had some business of his own for three days. He didn't dare to mention it to you. And so, out of kindness to him (it was my doing! Besides I'm the one who always bears the brunt), I invented a trip to Balbec. He simply put me down at Auteuil, at the house of a girlfriend of mine in the rue de l'Assomption,"⁵³⁹ where I spent the three days bored to tears. You see it is not a serious matter, no great harm done. I did indeed begin to suppose that you perhaps knew all about it, when I saw how you laughed when the postcards began to arrive, a week late. I quite see that it was absurd, and that it would have been better not to send any cards. But that wasn't my fault. I had bought the cards beforehand and given them to the driver before he dropped me at Auteuil, and then the fathead put them in his pocket and forgot about them instead of sending them on in an envelope to a friend of his near Balbec who was to forward them to you. I kept on supposing that they would turn up. He forgot all about them for five days, and instead of telling me, the idiot sent them on at once to Balbec. When he did tell me, I really threw a fit, I can tell you! And to go and worry you needlessly, when it's all the fault of that great imbecile, as a reward for my shutting myself up for three whole days, so that he might go and look after his family affairs! I didn't even venture to go out into Auteuil for fear of being seen. The only time that I did go out, I was dressed as a man, just for a laugh, if anything. And it was just my luck,

which follows me wherever I go, that the first person I came across was your Yid friend Bloch. But I don't believe it was from him that you learned that my trip to Balbec never existed except in my imagination, for he seemed not to recognize me."

I did not know what to say, not wishing to appear astonished, while I was appalled by all these lies. A feeling of horror, which gave me no desire to turn Albertine out of the house, far from it, was combined with a strong inclination to burst into tears. This last was caused not by the lie itself and by the annihilation of everything that I had so firmly believed to be true that I felt as though I were in a town that had been razed to the ground, where not a house remained standing, where the bare soil was merely heaped with rubble—but by the melancholy thought that, during those three days when she had been bored to tears in her friend's house at Auteuil, Albertine had never once felt any desire, the idea had perhaps never occurred to her to come and pay me a visit one day on the quiet, or to send a telegram asking me to go and see her at Auteuil. But I had no time to give myself up to these reflections. Whatever happened, I did not wish to appear surprised. I smiled with the air of a man who knows far more than he is going to say: "But that is only one thing out of a thousand. Listen, only this evening, at the Verdurins', I learned that what you had told me about Mlle Vinteuil . . ."

Albertine gazed at me fixedly with a tormented air, seeking to read in my eyes how much I knew. Now, what I knew and what I was about to tell her as to Mlle Vinteuil's true nature, it was true that it was not at the Verdurins' that I had learned it, but at Montjouvain long ago. But since I had always refrained, deliberately, from mentioning it to Albertine, I could now appear to have learned it only this evening. And I could almost feel a joy—after having felt, on the little train, so keen an anguish⁵⁴⁰—at possessing this memory of Montjouvain, which I would postdate, but which would nevertheless be the unanswerable proof, a crushing blow to Albertine. This time at least, I had no need to "seem to know" and to "make Albertine talk"; I *knew*, I had *seen* through the lighted window at Montjouvain.⁵⁴¹ It had been all very well for Albertine to tell me that her relations with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend had been perfectly pure, how could she when I swore to her (and swore without lying) that I knew the habits of these two women, how could she maintain any longer that, having lived in a daily intimacy with them, calling them "my big sisters," she had not been the object of propositions that would have made her break with them, if on the

contrary she had not accepted them? But I had no time to tell her what I knew. Albertine, imagining, as in the case of the pretended excursion to Balbec, that I had learned the truth, either from Mlle Vinteuil, if she had been at the Verdurins', or simply from Mme Verdurin herself who might have mentioned her to Mlle Vinteuil, did not allow me to speak but made a confession, the exact opposite of what I had supposed, which nevertheless, by showing me that she had never ceased to lie to me, caused me perhaps just as much pain (especially since I was no longer, as I said a moment ago, jealous of Mlle Vinteuil). In short, taking the words out of my mouth, Albertine proceeded to say: "You mean to tell me that you found out this evening that I lied to you when I pretended that I had been more or less brought up by Mlle Vinteuil's friend. It is true that I did lie to you a little. But I felt that you looked down on me so, and I saw too that you were so passionate about that man Vinteuil's music that since one of my school friends—this is true, I swear to you—had been a friend of Mlle Vinteuil's friend, I stupidly thought that I might make myself seem interesting to you by inventing the story that I had known the girls quite well. I felt that I was boring you, that you thought me a silly goose, I thought that if I told you that those people used to see a lot of me, that I could easily tell you all sorts of things about Vinteuil's work, I would acquire a little prestige in your eyes, that it would bring us closer together. When I lie to you, it is always out of affection for you. And it needed this fated Verdurin party to open your eyes to the truth, which has been a bit exaggerated, moreover. I bet Mlle Vinteuil's friend told you that she did not know me. She met me at least twice at my friend's house. But of course, I am not chic enough for people like that who have become so famous. They prefer to say that they have never met me."

Poor Albertine, when she thought that to tell me that she had been on such intimate terms with Mlle Vinteuil's friend would postpone our separation, would bring her closer to me, she had, as so often happens, reached the truth by a different path from the one that she had intended to take. Her showing herself better informed about music than I had supposed would never have prevented me from breaking up with her that evening, on the little train; and yet it was indeed that speech, which she had made with that object, which had immediately brought about far more than the impossibility of a rupture. Only she made an error in her interpretation, not of the effect that the speech was to have, but of the cause by virtue of which

it was to produce that effect, a cause that was not my discovery of her musical culture, but of her bad associations. What had abruptly drawn me closer to her, even more, what had bound me so tightly to her was not the expectation of a pleasure—and pleasure is too strong a word, a slight agreeableness—but the grip of crushing pain.

Once again I had to be careful not to keep too long a silence that might have led her to suppose that I was surprised. And so, touched by the discovery that she was so modest and had thought herself looked down upon in the Verdurin circle, I said to her tenderly: “But, my darling, I would gladly give you several hundred francs to let you go and play the chic lady wherever you please and invite M. and Mme Verdurin to a grand dinner.” Alas! Albertine was several persons in one. The most mysterious, most simple, most atrocious revealed herself in the answer that she gave me with an air of disgust and the exact words of which, to tell the truth, I could not quite make out (even the opening words, for she did not finish her sentence). I succeeded in establishing them only a little later when I had guessed what was in her mind. We hear things retrospectively when we have understood them.

“Thank you for nothing! Imagine spending a sou on those old fogies, I’d much rather you left me free for once in a way so that I can go get myself . . .” At once her face flushed crimson, a look of terror came into her eyes, she put her hand over her mouth as though she could have thrust back the words that she had just uttered and that I had completely failed to understand.⁵⁴²

“What did you say, Albertine?”

“No, nothing, I was half asleep and talking to myself.”

“Not a bit of it, you were wide awake.”

“I was thinking about asking the Verdurins to dinner, it is very good of you.”

“No, I mean what you said just now.”

She gave me endless versions, none of which agreed in the least, I do not say with her words that, being interrupted, remained vague, but with the interruption itself and the sudden blush that had accompanied it.

“Come, my darling, that is not what you were going to say, otherwise why did you stop short.”

“Because I felt that my request was indiscreet.”

“What request?”

“To be allowed to give a dinner party.”

“No, it is not that, there is no need of discretion between you and me.”

“Indeed there is, we ought never to take advantage of the people we love. In any case, I swear to you that that was all.”

On the one hand it was still impossible for me to doubt her sworn word; on the other hand her explanations did not satisfy my reason. I continued to press her. “Anyhow, you might at least have the courage to finish what you were saying, you stopped short at *casser*.”

“No, leave me alone!”

“But why?”

“Because it is dreadfully vulgar, I would be ashamed to say such a thing in front of you. I don’t know what I was thinking of, the words—I don’t even know what they mean, I heard them used in the street one day by some very vulgar people—just came to my lips without rhyme or reason. It had nothing to do with me or anybody else, I was simply dreaming aloud.”

I felt that I would extract nothing more from Albertine. She had lied to me when she had sworn, a moment ago, that what had cut her short had been a social fear of being indiscreet, since it had now become the shame of letting me hear her use a vulgar expression. Now this was certainly another lie. For when we were alone together there was no speech too perverse, no word too coarse for us to utter during our embraces. Anyhow, it was useless to insist at that moment. But my memory remained obsessed by the word *casser*. Albertine often said *casser du bois sur quelqu’un* or *casser du sucre*, or would simply say: “Ah! *Ce que je lui en ai cassé!*”⁵⁴³ But she would say this quite freely in my presence, and if it was this that she had meant to say, why had she suddenly stopped short, why had she blushed so deeply, placed her hands over her mouth, given a different turn to her speech, and, when she saw that I had heard the word *casser*, offered a false explanation? But as soon as I had abandoned the pursuit of an interrogation from which I would get no answer, the best thing to do was to appear to have lost interest in the matter, and, retracing my thoughts to Albertine’s reproaches of me for having gone to the Mistress’s, I said to her, very awkwardly, making indeed a sort of stupid excuse for my conduct: “Actually, I had been meaning to ask you to come to the Verdurins’ party this evening,” a statement that was doubly maladroit, for if I meant it, since I saw her all the time, why would I not have asked her? Furious at my lie and emboldened by my timidity: “You might have gone on asking me for a

thousand years,” she said, “I would never have consented. They are people who have always been against me, they have done everything they could to upset me.⁵⁴⁴ There was nothing I didn’t do for Mme Verdurin at Balbec, and I’ve been richly rewarded. If she summoned me to her deathbed, I wouldn’t go. There are some things that are impossible to forgive. As for you, it’s the first time you’ve treated me badly. When Françoise told me that you had gone out (she enjoyed telling me, you can be sure), I would rather have had my head split down the middle. I tried not to show it, but never in my life have I been so insulted.”

But while she was speaking, there continued within me, in the thoroughly alive and creative sleep of the unconscious (a sleep in which the things that barely touch us succeed in carving an impression, in which our sleeping hands take hold of the key that turns the lock, the key for which we have sought in vain), the quest of what it was that she had meant by that interrupted sentence the end of which I was so anxious to know. And all of a sudden an appalling word, of which I had never dreamed, burst upon me: *pot*.⁵⁴⁵ I cannot say that it came to me in a single flash, as when, in a long passive submission to an incomplete memory, while we try gently, cautiously, to draw it out, we remain fastened, glued to it. No, in contrast to the ordinary process of my memory, there were, I think, two parallel quests; the first took into account not merely Albertine’s words but her look of extreme annoyance when I had offered her a sum of money with which to give a grand dinner, a look that seemed to say: “Thank you, the idea of spending money on things that bore me, when without money I could do things that I enjoy doing!” And it was perhaps the memory of this look that she had given me which made me alter my method in discovering the end of her unfinished sentence. Until then I had been hypnotized by her last word: *casser*. What had she meant to break? *Casser du bois*? No. *Du sucre*? No. Break, break, break. And all at once her look and shrugging her shoulders at the moment of my suggestion that she should give a dinner party turned me back to the words that had preceded. And immediately I saw that she had not said *casser* but *me faire casser*. Horror! It was this that she would have preferred. Twofold horror! For even the vilest of prostitutes, who consents to that sort of thing, or desires it, does not use that appalling expression to the man who yields to her desires. She would feel the degradation too great. To a woman alone, if she loves women, she says this, as an excuse for giving herself presently to a man. Albertine had not been

lying when she told me that she was half dreaming. Distracted, impulsive, not thinking that she was with me, she had, with a shrug of her shoulders, begun to speak as she would have spoken to one of those women, to one, perhaps, of my young girls in flower. And abruptly recalled to reality, crimson with shame, thrusting back between her lips what she was going to say, plunged in despair, she had refused to utter another word. I had not a moment to lose if I was not to let her see my despair. But already, after my sudden burst of rage, the tears came to my eyes. As at Balbec, on the night that followed her revelation of her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, I must immediately invent a plausible cause for my grief, and one that was at the same time capable of creating so profound an effect on Albertine as to give me a few days' respite before I came to a decision. And so, at the moment when she told me that she had never received such an insult as the one that I had inflicted upon her by going out, that she would rather have died than hear Françoise tell her of my departure, when, as though irritated by her absurd susceptibility, I was on the point of telling her that what I had done was nothing, that there was nothing that could offend her in my going out—since during these moments, moving on a parallel course, my unconscious search for what she had meant to say after the word *casser* had proved successful, and the despair into which my discovery plunged me could not be completely hidden, instead of defending, I accused myself: "My little Albertine," I said to her in a gentle voice that was drowned in my first tears, "I might tell you that you are mistaken, that what I did this evening is nothing, but I would be lying; it is you who are right, you have realized the truth, my poor child, which is that six months ago, three months ago, when I was still so fond of you, never would I have done such a thing. It is a mere nothing, and it is enormous, because of the immense change in my heart of which it is the sign. And since you have detected this change that I hoped to conceal from you, that leads me on to tell you this: My little Albertine" (and here I addressed her with a profound gentleness and melancholy), "don't you see, the life that you are leading here is boring to you, it is better that we should part, and as the best partings are those that are ended at once, I ask you, to cut short the great sorrow that I am bound to feel, to bid me goodbye tonight and to leave in the morning without my seeing you again, while I am asleep."

She appeared stunned, still incredulous and already disconsolate. "Tomorrow? You really mean it?"

And in spite of the anguish that I felt in speaking of our parting as though it were already in the past—partly perhaps because of that very anguish—I began to give Albertine the most precise instructions as to certain things that she would have to do after she left the house. And passing from one request to another, I soon found myself entering into the minutest details. “Be so kind,” I said, with infinite sadness, “as to send me back that book of Bergotte’s which is at your aunt’s. There is no hurry about it, in three days, in a week, whenever you like, but remember that I don’t want to have to write and ask you for it, that would be too painful. We have been happy together, we feel now that we would be unhappy.”

“Don’t say that we feel that we would be unhappy,” Albertine interrupted me, “don’t say ‘we,’ it is only you who feel that.”

“Yes, very well, you or I, as you like, for one reason or another. But it is absurdly late, you must go to bed—we have decided to part tonight.”

“Pardon me, *you* have decided, and I obey you because I don’t want to upset you.”

“Very well, it is I who have decided, but that makes it none the less painful for me. I don’t say that it will be painful for long, you know that I am not capable of remembering things for long, but for the first few days I will be so miserable without you! And so I feel that it will be useless to revive the memory with letters, we must end everything at once.”

“Yes, you are right,” she said to me with a crushed air, which was enhanced by the strain of fatigue on her features due to the lateness of the hour; “rather than have one finger chopped off, then another, I prefer to lay my head on the block at once.”

“Mon Dieu, I am appalled when I think how late I am keeping you out of bed, it is madness. However, it’s the last night! You will have plenty of time to sleep for the rest of your life.” And as I suggested to her thus that it was time to say goodnight I sought to postpone the moment when she would have said it. “Would you like me, as a distraction during the first few days, to tell Bloch to send his cousin Esther to the place where you will be staying? He will do that for me.”

“I don’t know why you say that” (I had said it in an endeavor to wrest a confession from Albertine); “there is only one person I care about, and that’s you,” Albertine said to me, and her words filled me with comfort. But, the next moment, what a blow she dealt me: “I remember, of course, that I did give this Esther my photograph because she kept on asking me for

it and I saw that she would like to have it, but as for feeling any liking for her or wishing ever to see her again, never!" And yet Albertine was of so frivolous a nature that she went on: "If she wants to see me, it is all the same to me, she is very nice, but I don't care in the least either way."

And so when I had spoken to her of the photograph of Esther that Bloch had sent me (and that I had not even received when I mentioned it to Albertine) my mistress had gathered that Bloch had shown me a photograph of herself, given by her to Esther. In my worst suppositions, I had never imagined that any such intimacy could have existed between Albertine and Esther.⁵⁴⁶ Albertine had not known how to answer me when I spoke of the photograph. And now, supposing me, wrongly, to be in the know, she thought it better to confess. I was appalled. "And, Albertine, let me ask you to do me one more favor, never attempt to see me again. If at any time, as may happen in a year, in two years, in three years, we should find ourselves in the same town, avoid me." Then, seeing that she did not reply in the affirmative to my prayer: "My Albertine, don't do it, never see me again in this life. It would hurt me too much. For I was really fond of you, you know. Of course, when I told you the other day that I wanted to see the friend again whom I mentioned to you at Balbec, you thought that it was all settled. Not at all, I assure you, it was quite immaterial to me. You were convinced that I had long made up my mind to leave you, that my affection was all make-believe."

"Not at all, you are crazy, I never thought so," she said sadly.

"You are right, you must never think so, I did genuinely feel for you, not love perhaps, but a great, a very great affection, more than you can imagine."

"Of course I can imagine it. And do you suppose that I don't love you!"

"It hurts me terribly to leave you."

"It hurts me a thousand times more," replied Albertine.

Already, a moment earlier I had felt that I could no longer hold back the tears that came welling up in my eyes. And these tears did not spring from at all the same sort of sadness that I had felt long ago when I said to Gilberte: "It is better that we should not see one another again, life is dividing us." No doubt when I wrote this to Gilberte, I said to myself that when I would be in love not with her but with another, the excess of my love would diminish the one that I might perhaps have been able to inspire, as though two people must inevitably have only a certain quantity of love at

their disposal; of which the surplus taken by one is subtracted from the other, and that from her too, as from Gilberte, I should be doomed to part. But the situation was entirely different for several reasons, the first of which (and it had, in its turn, given rise to the others) was that the lack of willpower that my grandmother and mother had observed in me with alarm, at Combray, and before which each of them, so great is the energy with which a sick man imposes his weakness on others, had capitulated in turn,⁵⁴⁷ this lack of willpower had gone on increasing at an ever accelerated pace. When I felt that my company was boring Gilberte, I had still enough strength left to give her up; I no longer had the same strength when I had made a similar discovery with regard to Albertine and could think only of keeping her by force. With the result that, whereas I wrote to Gilberte that I would not see her again, meaning quite sincerely not to see her, I said this to Albertine as a pure falsehood, and in the hope of bringing about a reconciliation. Thus we presented each to the other an appearance that was widely different from the reality. And no doubt it is always so when two people stand face to face, since each of them is ignorant of a part of what exists in the other (even what he knows, he can understand only in part) and both of them reveal what is least personal to them, either because they have themselves not properly untangled and regard as negligible what is most personal, or because insignificant advantages that do not belong to them particularly seem more important and more flattering to themselves, and at the same time they pretend not to care about certain things they value in order not to be despised for not having them, and these are precisely the things that they appear to disdain above all else and even to abhor. But in love this misunderstanding is carried to its supreme degree because, except perhaps when we are children, we try to make the appearance that we assume, rather than reflect exactly what is in our mind, be what our mind considers best adapted to enable us to obtain what we desire, which in my case, since my return to the house, was to be able to keep Albertine as docile as she had been in the past, was that she should not in her irritation ask me for a greater freedom, which I intended to give her one day, but which at this moment, when I was afraid of her cravings for independence, would have made me too jealous. After a certain age, from self-esteem and from sagacity, it is to the things that we most desire that we pretend to attach no importance. But in love, our mere sagacity—which for that matter is probably not true wisdom—forces us speedily enough to this genius for

duplicity. All that I had dreamed, as a child, to be the sweetest thing in love, what had seemed to me to be the very essence of love, was to pour out freely, before the one I loved, my tenderness, my gratitude for her kindness, my longing for a perpetual life together. But I had become only too well aware, from my own experience and from that of my friends, that the expression of such sentiments is far from being contagious. The case of an affected old woman like M. de Charlus, who, by dint of seeing in his imagination a handsome young man, thinks that he himself has become a handsome young man, and betrays more and more effeminacy in his risible affectations of virility, such a case falls under a law that is applicable far more widely than to Charluses alone, a law so generalized that even love does not exhaust it entirely; we do not see ourselves as others do, and we “follow” our thoughts, the object that is in front of us, invisible to others (made visible sometimes in a work of art, whence the frequent disillusionment of his admirers when they are admitted into the presence of the author, whose inner beauty is so imperfectly reflected in his face). Once we have noticed this, we no longer “let ourself go”; I had taken care in the afternoon not to tell Albertine how grateful I was to her that she had not remained at the Trocadéro. And tonight, having been afraid that she might leave me, I had feigned a desire to part from her, a feint which for that matter, as we will see presently, had not been dictated solely by the enlightenment that I supposed myself to have received from my former loves and was trying to bring to the service of this one. The fear that Albertine was perhaps going to say to me: “I want to be allowed to go out by myself at certain hours, I wish to be able to stay away for twenty-four hours,” or some such request for freedom which I did not attempt to define, but which alarmed me, this thought had crossed my mind for a moment during the Verdurins’ party. But it had been dispelled, contradicted moreover by the memory of how Albertine told me constantly how happy she was with me. The intention to leave me, if it existed in Albertine, was made manifest only in an obscure fashion, in certain sorrowful glances, certain gestures of impatience, remarks that meant nothing of the sort, but which, if one analyzed them (and there was not even any need of analysis, for we can immediately detect the language of passion, ordinary people understand these remarks that can be explained only by vanity, rancor, jealousy, unexpressed as it happens, but detected at once by the interlocutor through an intuitive faculty which, like the “good sense” of which

Descartes speaks,⁵⁴⁸ is the most widespread thing in the world), could only be explained by the presence in her of a sentiment that she concealed and that might lead her to form plans for another life without me. Just as this intention was not expressed in her remarks in a logical fashion, so the presentiment of this intention, which I had felt tonight, remained just as vague in me. I continued to live by the hypothesis that admitted as true everything that Albertine told me. But it may be that in myself, during this time, a wholly contrary hypothesis, about which I refused to think, never left me; this is all the more probable since, otherwise, I would have felt no hesitation in telling Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins', and, indeed, my lack of astonishment at her anger would not have been comprehensible. So that what probably existed in me was the idea of an Albertine entirely contrary to the one that my reason formed of her, to the one also that her own remarks portrayed, an Albertine that all the same was not wholly invented, since she was like a prophetic mirror of certain impulses that occurred in her, such as her ill humor at my having gone to the Verdurins'. Besides, for a long time past, my frequent anxieties, my fear of telling Albertine that I loved her, all this corresponded to another hypothesis that explained many things besides, and had also this to be said for it, that, if one adopted the first hypothesis, the second became more probable, for by allowing myself to give way to effusions of tenderness for Albertine, I obtained from her nothing but irritation (to which moreover she assigned a different cause).

I must say that what had appeared to me most serious and had most struck me as a symptom of the fact that she had anticipated my accusation was that she had said to me: "I believe Mlle Vinteuil was to be there?" to which I had replied in the cruelest way possible: "You didn't tell me that you had met Mme Verdurin." Thus, as soon as I found Albertine no longer complaisant, instead of telling her that I was sad, I became mean.

If I analyze my feelings by this hypothesis, by the invariable system of retorts expressing the exact opposite of what I was feeling, I can be quite certain that if, that night, I told her that I was going to leave her, it was because—even before I had realized it—I was afraid that she might desire some freedom (I would have been hard put to say what this freedom was that made me tremble, but anyhow some state of freedom in which she would have been able to be unfaithful to me, or, at least, in which I would no longer have been able to be certain that she was not) and because I

wanted to show her, from pride, from cunning, that I was very far from fearing anything of the sort, as I had done already at Balbec, when I was anxious that she should have a good opinion of me, and later on, when I was anxious that she should not have time to feel bored with me.

Finally, the objection that might be offered to this second hypothesis—unformulated—that everything Albertine said to me indicated on the contrary that the life she preferred was the life in my house, resting, reading, solitude, a loathing of Sapphic loves, etc., need not be considered seriously. For if on her part Albertine had chosen to interpret my feelings from what I said to her, she would have learned the exact opposite of the truth, since I never expressed a desire to part from her except when I was unable to do without her, and at Balbec I had confessed to her that I was in love with another woman, first Andrée, then a mysterious stranger, on the two occasions on which jealousy had revived my love for Albertine. My words, therefore, did not in the least reflect my feelings. If the reader has no more than a faint impression of these, that is because, as narrator, I expose my feelings to him at the same time as I repeat my words. But if I concealed the former and he were acquainted only with the latter, my actions, so little in keeping with my words, would so often give him the impression of strange reversals that he would think me more or less mad. A procedure that would not, for that matter, be much more false than the one that I have adopted, for the images that prompted me to action, so opposed to those that were portrayed in my words, were at that moment extremely obscure; I was but imperfectly aware of the nature that guided my actions; at present, I have a clear conception of its subjective truth. As for its objective truth, that is to say whether the intuitions of that nature grasped more exactly than my reason Albertine's true intentions, whether I was right to trust that nature or whether on the contrary it did not alter Albertine's intentions instead of making them plain, that I find difficult to say.

The vague fear I had felt at the Verdurins' that Albertine might leave me had been at first dispelled. When I returned home, it had been with the feeling that I myself was a captive, not with that of finding a captive in the house. But the dispelled fear had gripped me all the more violently when, at the moment of my informing Albertine that I had been to the Verdurins', I saw her face veiled with a look of enigmatic irritation that moreover was not making itself visible for the first time. I knew quite well that it was only the crystallization in the flesh of reasoned grievances, of ideas clear to the

person who forms and does not express them, a synthesis rendered visible but not therefore rational, which he who gathers its precious residue from the face of his beloved, endeavors in his turn, so that he may understand what is occurring in her, to reduce by analysis to its intellectual elements. The approximate equation of that unknown quantity that Albertine's thoughts were to me, had given me, more or less: "I knew his suspicions, I was sure that he would attempt to verify them, and so that I might not hinder him, he has worked out his little plan in secret." But if this was the state of mind (and she had never expressed it to me) in which Albertine was living, must she not regard with horror, no longer have the strength to lead, might she not at any moment decide to end an existence in which, if she was, in desire at any rate, guilty, she must feel herself exposed, tracked down, prevented from ever yielding to her desires, without thereby disarming my jealousy; and if innocent in intention and fact, she had had every right, for some time past, to feel discouraged, seeing that never once, from Balbec, where she had shown so much perseverance in avoiding the risk of her ever being left alone with Andrée, until this very day when she had agreed not to go to the Verdurins' and not to stay at the Trocadéro, she had not succeeded in regaining my trust? All the more so because I could not say that her behavior was not exemplary. If at Balbec, when anyone mentioned girls who had a bad reputation, she used often to copy their laughter, their wriggings, their general manner, which was a torture to me because of what I supposed that it must mean to her girlfriends, now that she knew my opinion on the subject, as soon as anyone made an allusion to things of that sort, she ceased to take part in the conversation, not only in speech but with the expression on her face. Whether it was in order not to contribute her share to the slanders that were being uttered about some woman or other, or for a quite different reason, the only thing that was noticeable then, upon those so mobile features, was that from the moment in which the topic was broached they had made their inattention evident, while preserving exactly the same expression that they had worn a moment earlier. And this immobility of even a light expression was as heavy as a silence. It would have been impossible to say that she blamed, that she approved, that she knew or did not know about these things. None of her features bore any relation to anything except another feature. Her nose, her mouth, her eyes formed a perfect harmony, isolated from everything else;

she looked like a pastel, and seemed to have no more heard what had just been said than if it had been uttered in front of a portrait by La Tour.⁵⁴⁹

My enslavement, of which I had already been conscious when, as I gave the driver Brichot's address, I caught sight of the light in her window, had ceased to weigh upon me shortly afterward, when I saw that Albertine appeared so cruelly conscious of her own. And in order that it might seem to her less burdensome, that she might not decide to break her bonds of her own accord, I had felt that the most effective plan was to give her the impression that it would not be permanent and that I myself was looking forward to its termination. Seeing that my feint had proved successful, I might well have felt happy, in the first place because what I had so greatly dreaded, Albertine's determination (as I supposed) to leave me, was shown to be nonexistent, and secondly, because, quite apart from the object that I had had in mind, the very success of my feint, by proving that I was something more to Albertine than a scorned lover, whose jealousy is flouted, all of his ruses detected in advance, restored to our love a sort of virginity, revived for it the days in which she could still, at Balbec, so readily believe that I was in love with another woman. For she would probably not have believed that any longer, but she was taking seriously my feigned determination to part from her now and forever.

She appeared to suspect that the cause of it might be something that had happened at the Verdurins'. I told her that I had met a dramatist, Bloch, who was a great friend of Léa's, and to whom Léa had told some strange things. (I hoped by telling her this to make her suppose that I knew a great deal more than I cared to say about Bloch's cousins.) But feeling a need to soothe the anxiety into which I was worked by my pretense of a rupture, I said to her: "Albertine, can you swear that you have never lied to me?"

She gazed fixedly into space before replying: "Yes, that is to say no. I ought not to have told you that Andrée was greatly taken with Bloch, we never met him."

"Then why did you say so?"

"Because I was afraid that you had believed other stories about her."

"That's all?"

She stared once again into space and then said: "I ought not, when I spoke to you just now about Léa, to have kept from you a three weeks' trip that I took with her once. But I knew you so slightly in those days!"

"It was before Balbec?"

“Before the second time, yes.”

I watched a tongue of flame seize and devour in an instant a novel that I had spent millions of minutes in writing. What was the use? What was the use? Of course I understood that Albertine had revealed these two facts to me because she thought that I had learned them indirectly from Léa; and that there was no reason why a hundred similar facts should not exist. I realized too that Albertine’s words, when one interrogated her, never contained an atom of truth, that the truth was something she let slip only in spite of herself, as a result of a sudden mixing together in her mind of the facts that she had previously been determined to conceal with the belief that one had got wind of them.

“But two things are nothing,” I said to Albertine, “let us have as many as four, so that you may leave me some memories of you. What other revelations have you got for me?”

Once again she stared into space. To what belief in a future life was she adapting her falsehood, with what gods less obliging than she had supposed was she seeking to ally herself? This cannot have been an easy matter, for her silence and the fixity of her gaze continued for some time. “No, nothing else,” she said at length. And, notwithstanding my persistence, she adhered, easily now, to “nothing else.” And what a lie! For, from the moment when she had acquired those tastes until the day when she had been shut up in my house, how many times, in how many places, on how many excursions must she have gratified them! The daughters of Gomorrah are at once rare enough and so numerous that, in any crowd of people, one does not pass unnoticed by the other. From that moment a meeting becomes easy.

I remembered with horror an evening that at the time had struck me as merely absurd. One of my friends had invited me to dine at a restaurant with his mistress and another of his friends who had also brought his own. The two women were not long in coming to an understanding, but were so impatient to enjoy one another that, with the soup, their feet were searching for one another, often finding mine. Presently their legs were interlaced. My two friends noticed nothing; I was in agonies. One of the women, who could contain herself no longer, stooped under the table, saying that she had dropped something. Then one of them complained of a headache and asked to go upstairs to the lavatory. The other realized that it was time for her to go and meet a woman friend at the theater. Finally, I was left alone with my two friends who suspected nothing. The lady with the headache reappeared

but begged to be allowed to go home by herself to wait for her lover at his house, so that she might take a dose of antipyrine.⁵⁵⁰ They became great friends, used to go about together, one of them, dressed as a man, picking up little girls and taking them to the other, initiating them. One of them had a little boy who, she pretended, was troublesome, and handed him over for punishment to her friend, who set to work with a strong arm. One may say that there was no place, however public, in which they did not do what is most secret.

“But Léa behaved perfectly properly with me throughout the trip,” Albertine told me. “She was indeed a great deal more reserved than plenty of society women.”

“Are there any society women who have shown a lack of reserve with you, Albertine?”

“Never.”

“Then what do you mean?”

“Oh, well, she was less free in her speech.”

“For example?”

“She would never, like many of the women you meet, have used the expression ‘rotten,’ or say: ‘I don’t care a damn for anybody.’”

It seemed to me that a part of the novel that the flames had so far spared was finally crumbling in ashes. My discouragement might have persisted. Albertine’s words, when I thought of them, made it give place to a furious rage. This succumbed to a sort of tender emotion. I too, since I had come home and declared that I wished to break up with her, had been lying. And this desire for a parting, which I had feigned with perseverance, gradually brought me some of the sadness that I would have felt if I had really wanted to leave Albertine.

Besides, even when I thought in fits and starts, in twinges, as we say of other bodily pains, of the orgiastic life that Albertine had led before she met me, I admired all the more the docility of my captive and ceased to feel any resentment. No doubt, never, during our life together, had I failed to let Albertine know that such a life would in all probability be merely temporary, so that Albertine might continue to find some charm in it. But tonight I had gone further, having feared that vague threats of separation were no longer sufficient, contradicted as they would doubtless be, in Albertine’s mind, by her idea of a great and jealous love of her, which must have made me, she seemed to imply, go investigate at the Verdurins’. That

night I thought that, among the other reasons that might have made me suddenly decide, without even realizing except as I went on what I was doing, to play this comedy of a rupture, there was above all the fact that, when, in one of those impulses to which my father was liable, I threatened another person's safety, since I did not, like him, have the courage to carry out a threat, in order not to let it be supposed that it had been but empty words, I would go to considerable lengths in pretending to carry out my threat and would recoil only when my adversary, genuinely believing in my sincerity, had begun seriously to tremble.

Besides, in these lies, we feel that there is indeed a grain of truth, that, if life does not bring any changes in our loves, it is ourselves who will seek to feign them and speak of separation, so strongly do we feel that all love, and everything else evolves rapidly toward a farewell. We would like to shed the tears that it will bring long before it comes. No doubt there had been, on this occasion, in the scene that I had enacted, a practical reason. I had suddenly determined to keep Albertine because I felt that she was scattered about among other people whom I could not prevent her from joining. But had she renounced them all forever for me, I might have been all the more firmly resolved never to leave her, for a separation is, by jealousy, rendered cruel, but, by gratitude, impossible. I felt that in any case I was fighting the decisive battle in which I must conquer or succumb. I would have offered Albertine in an hour all that I possessed, because I said to myself: "Everything depends upon this battle." But such battles are less like those of old days that lasted for a few hours than a battle of today that does not end on the next day, nor on the day after, nor in the following week. We give all our strength, because we steadfastly believe that we will never need any strength again. And more than a year passes without bringing a "decisive" victory.

Perhaps an unconscious reminiscence of lying scenes enacted by M. de Charlus, in whose company I was when the fear of Albertine's leaving me had seized hold of me, was added to the rest. But, later on, I heard my mother say something of which I was then unaware and that leads me to believe that I found all the elements of this scene in myself, in one of those obscure reserves of heredity that certain emotions, acting in this respect as drugs such as alcohol and coffee act upon the residue of our stored-up strength, place at our disposal. When my Aunt Léonie learned from Eulalie that Françoise, convinced that her mistress would never again leave the

house, had secretly planned some outing about which my aunt was to know nothing, she, the day before, would pretend to have made up her mind that she would attempt to go for a drive the next day. The incredulous Françoise was ordered not only to prepare my aunt's clothes beforehand, to give an airing to those that had been put away for too long, but to order a carriage, to arrange, to within a quarter of an hour, all the details of the day. It was only when Françoise, convinced or at any rate shaken, had been forced to confess to my aunt the plan that she herself had formed, that my aunt would publicly abandon her own, so as not, she said, to interfere with Françoise's arrangements. Similarly, in order that Albertine should not believe that I was exaggerating and to make her proceed as far as possible in the idea that we were to part, drawing myself the obvious inferences from the proposal that I had advanced, I had begun to anticipate the time that was to begin the next day and was to last forever, the time when we would be parted, addressing to Albertine the same requests as if we were not to be reconciled almost immediately. Like a general who considers that if a feint is to succeed in deceiving the enemy it must be pushed to the limit, I had employed in this feint almost as much of my store of sensibility as if it had been genuine. This fictitious parting scene ended by causing me almost as much grief as if it had been real, possibly because one of the actors, Albertine, by believing it to be real, had enhanced the other's illusion. While we were living, from day to day, in a way that, even if painful, was still endurable, held down to earth by the ballast of habit and by that certainty that the next day, should it be cruel, would contain the presence of the person to whom one clings. And here was I foolishly destroying all that doleful life. I was destroying it, it is true, only in a fictitious fashion, but this was enough to make me wretched; perhaps because the sad words that we utter, even mendaciously, carry in themselves their sorrow and inject it deeply into us; perhaps because we realize that, by feigning farewells, we evoke by anticipation an hour that must inevitably come later on; then we cannot be certain that we have not triggered the mechanism that will make it strike. In every bluff there is an element, however small, of uncertainty as to what the person whom we are deceiving is going to do. What if this comedy of parting should lead to a parting! We cannot consider the possibility, however unlikely it may seem, without a pang of anguish. We are doubly anxious, because the parting would then occur at the moment when it would be intolerable, when we had been made to suffer by the

woman who would be leaving us before having healed or at least appeased us. Finally, we no longer have the solid ground of habit upon which we rest, even in our sorrow. We have deliberately deprived ourselves of it, we have given the present day an exceptional importance, have detached it from the days before and after it; it floats without roots like a day of departure; our imagination ceasing to be paralyzed by habit has awakened, we have suddenly added to our everyday love sentimental dreams that enormously enhance it, make indispensable to us a presence upon which, in fact, we are no longer certain that we can rely. No doubt it is precisely in order to assure ourselves of that presence for the future that we have indulged in the make-believe of being able to dispense with it. But this game, we have ourselves been taken in by it, we have begun to suffer again because we have created something new, unfamiliar, that thus resembles those cures that are destined in time to heal the malady from which we are suffering, but the first effects of which are to aggravate it.

I had tears in my eyes, like the people who, alone in their bedrooms, imagining, in the wayward course of their meditations, the death of someone whom they love, form so detailed a picture of the grief that they would feel that they end by feeling it. And so as I multiplied my advice to Albertine as to how she should behave toward me after we had parted, I seemed to be feeling almost as keen a distress as though we had not been on the verge of a reconciliation. Besides, was I so certain that I could bring about this reconciliation, bring Albertine back to the idea of a shared life, and, if I succeeded for the time being, that in her, the state of mind that this scene had dispelled would not revive? I felt myself, but did not believe myself to be master of the future, because I realized that this feeling was due merely to the fact that the future did not yet exist, and that thus I was not crushed by its inevitability. In short, while I lied, I was perhaps putting into my words more truth than I supposed. I had just had an example of this, when I told Albertine that I would quickly forget her; this was what had indeed happened to me in the case of Gilberte, whom I now refrained from going to see in order to escape, not suffering, but an irksome duty. And certainly I had suffered when I wrote to Gilberte that I would not see her anymore. Yet I saw Gilberte only from time to time. Whereas the whole of Albertine's time belonged to me. And in love it is easier to relinquish a feeling than to give up a habit. But all these painful words about our parting, if the strength to utter them had been given me because I knew

them to be untrue, were on the other hand sincere on Albertine's lips when I heard her exclaim: "Ah! I promise, I will never see you again. Anything sooner than see you cry like that, my darling. I do not wish to cause you any sorrow. Since it must be, we will never meet again." They were sincere, as they could not have been coming from me, because, since Albertine felt nothing stronger for me than friendship, on the one hand the renunciation that they promised cost her less; on the other hand because my tears, which would have been so small a matter in a great love, seemed to her almost extraordinary and distressed her, transposed into the domain of that state of friendship in which she dwelt, a friendship greater than mine for her, to judge by what she had just said—by what she had just said, because when two people part, it is the one who is not genuinely in love who makes the tender speeches, since love does not express itself directly—by what she had just said and what was perhaps not altogether untrue, for the thousand kindnesses of love may end by arousing, in the person who inspires without feeling it, an affection, a gratitude less selfish than the sentiment that provoked them, which, perhaps, after years of separation, when nothing of that sentiment remains in the former lover, will still persist in the beloved.

There was only one moment when I felt a kind of hatred for her, which only rekindled my need to hold on to her. Since, being exclusively jealous of Mlle Vinteuil that evening, I thought with the greatest indifference of the Trocadéro, not only because I had sent her there to avoid the Verdurins, but even when I learned of Léa's being there, on account of which I had had her brought back so that she would not meet her, I said Léa's name without thinking, and Albertine, wary and thinking that I had perhaps heard something more, took the initiative and exclaimed volubly, but without looking me in the face, "I know her very well. Some of my friends and I went to see her act last year, and after the performance we went to her dressing room. She changed in front of us. It was very interesting." Then my mind was compelled to relinquish Mlle Vinteuil and, in a desperate effort, racing through the abysses of impossible reconstructions, attached itself to the actress, to that evening when Albertine had gone to her dressing room. On the other hand, after all the oaths that she had sworn to me, and in so truthful a tone, after the complete sacrifice of her freedom, how was I to suppose that there was anything wrong in all this? And yet, were not my suspicions antennae pointing in the direction of the truth, since if she had sacrificed the Verdurins for me in order to go to the Trocadéro, nevertheless

at the Verdurins' Mlle Vinteuil was expected, and at the Trocadéro, from which, for that matter, she had come away in order to go for a drive with me, there had been Léa, who seemed to me to be disturbing me without cause and whom all the same, in that remark that I had not demanded of her, she admitted that she had known on a larger scale than that of my fears, in circumstances that were indeed dubious, for what could have induced her to go like that to that dressing room? If I ceased to suffer because of Mlle Vinteuil when I suffered because of Léa, those two tormentors of my day, it was either on account of the inability of my mind to picture too many scenes at one time, or on account of the interference of my nervous emotions of which my jealousy was but the echo. I could deduce from them only that she had belonged no more to Léa than to Mlle Vinteuil and that I was thinking of Léa only because the thought of her still caused me pain. But the fact that my twin jealousies were dying down—to revive now and then, alternately—did not mean, in any way, that they did not on the contrary correspond each to some truth of which I had had a foreboding, that of these women I must not say to myself none, but all. I say a foreboding, for I could not project myself to all the points of time and space that I would have had to occupy, and besides, what instinct would have given me the coordinates of one with another necessary to enable me to surprise Albertine, here, at one moment, with Léa, or with the Balbec girls, or with that friend of Mme Bontemps whom she had brushed against, or with the girl on the tennis court who had nudged her with her elbow, or with Mlle Vinteuil?

“My little Albertine,” I replied, “it is very good of you to make me this promise. Anyhow, for the first few years at least, I will avoid the places where I might meet you. You don’t know whether you will be going to Balbec this summer? Because in that case I would arrange not to go there myself.” Now, if I continued to progress thus, anticipating time to come in my lying inventions, it was with a view no less to frighten Albertine than to making myself miserable. As a man who at first had no serious reason for losing his temper, becomes completely intoxicated by the sound of his own voice, and lets himself be carried away by a fury engendered not by his grievance but by his anger that itself is steadily growing, so I was falling ever faster and faster down the slope of my sadness, toward an ever more profound despair, and with the inertia of a man who feels the cold grip him, makes no effort to resist it and even finds a sort of pleasure in shivering.

And if, presently, I had, as I fully supposed, the strength to control myself, to react and to reverse my engines, far more than from the sorrow that Albertine had caused me by so unfriendly a greeting on my return, it was from the sorrow that I had felt in imagining, so as to pretend to be resolving them, the formalities of an imaginary separation, in foreseeing its consequences, that Albertine's kiss, when the time came for her to bid me goodnight, would have to console me now. In any case, it must not be Albertine who bid me goodnight of her own accord, for that would have made more difficult the reversal by which I would propose to her to abandon the idea of our parting. And so I continued to remind her that the time to say goodnight had long since come and gone, a device that, by leaving the initiative to me, enabled me to put it off for a moment longer. And thus I scattered with allusions to the lateness of the hour, to our exhaustion, the questions that I kept putting to Albertine.

"I don't know where I will be going," she replied to the last of these, with a preoccupied air. "Perhaps I will go to Touraine, to my aunt's." And this first plan that she suggested froze me as though it were beginning to make definitive our final separation. She looked around the room, at the pianola, the blue satin armchairs. "I still cannot get used to the idea that I will not see all this again, tomorrow, or the next day, or ever. Poor little room! It seems to me quite impossible; I cannot get it into my head."

"It had to be; you were unhappy here."

"No, I was not unhappy, it is now that I will be unhappy."

"No, I assure you, it is better for you."

"For you, perhaps!"

I began to stare fixedly into space, as though prey to a great uncertainty, I was struggling with an idea that had just occurred to me. Then, all of a sudden: "Listen, Albertine, you say that you are happier here, that you are going to be unhappy."

"Why, of course."

"That appalls me; would you like us to try to carry on for a few weeks? Who knows, week by week, we may perhaps go on for a long time; you know that there are temporary arrangements that end by becoming permanent."

"Oh, how kind you are!"

"Only in that case it is ridiculous of us to have made ourselves wretched like this over nothing for hours on end; it is like making all the preparations

for a long journey and then staying at home. I am shattered with grief.”

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I sat her on my knee, I took Bergotte's manuscript that she so longed to have and wrote on the cover: "To my little Albertine, in memory of a new lease on life."

"Now," I said to her, "go and sleep until tomorrow, my darling, for you must be worn out."

"Above all, I am very happy."

"Do you love me a little bit?"

"A hundred times more than ever."

I would have been wrong to be content with this little piece of playacting, even if it had not been carried to the pitch of a real scene on the stage. Had we done no more than quite simply discuss a separation, even that would have been a serious matter. In conversations of this sort, we suppose that we are speaking not merely insincerely, which is true, but freely. Whereas they are generally, though we do not know it, murmured in spite of us; the first murmur of a storm that we do not suspect. In reality, what we express at such times is the opposite of our desire (which is to live forever with her whom we love), but there is also that impossibility of living together that is the cause of our daily suffering, a suffering preferred by us to that of a separation, but which will end, in spite of ourselves, by separating us. Generally speaking, not, however, at once. It often happens—this was not, as we will see, my case with Albertine—that, sometime after the words in which we did not believe, we put into action a vague attempt at a deliberate separation, not painful, temporary. We ask the woman, so that afterward she may be happier in our company, so that we on the other hand may momentarily escape from continual worries and fatigues, to go away without us, or to let us go away without her for a few days, the first days that we have—for a long time past—spent, as would have seemed to us impossible, away from her. Very soon she returns to take her place by our fireside. Only this separation, short, but completed, is not so arbitrarily decided upon, not so certainly the only one that we have in mind. The same sorrows begin again, the same difficulty in living together intensifies, only a parting is no longer so difficult as before; we have begun mentioning it, and have then put it into practice in a friendly fashion. But these are only prodromes⁵⁵¹ that we have not recognized. Presently, to the temporary and smiling separation will succeed the terrible and final separation for which we have, without knowing it, paved the way.

“Come to my room in five minutes and let me see something of you, my darling boy. It would be so nice of you. But afterward I will fall asleep at once, for I am almost dead.”

It was indeed a dead woman that I beheld when, presently, I entered her room. She had gone to sleep as soon as she lay down, her sheets wrapped about her body like a shroud had assumed, with their stately folds, a rigidity of stone. One would have said that, as in certain Last Judgments of the Middle Ages, her head alone was emerging from the tomb, awaiting in its sleep the Archangel’s trumpet.⁵⁵² This head had been surprised by sleep almost flung back, the hair disheveled. And on seeing the expressionless body lying there, I asked myself what logarithmic table it constituted so that all the actions in which it might have been involved, from the nudge of an elbow to the brushing of a skirt, were able to cause me, stretched out to the infinity of all the points that it had occupied in space and time, and from time to time sharply reawakened in my memory, so intense an anguish, although I knew those actions to have been determined in her by impulses, desires, which in another person, in herself five years earlier or five years later, would have left me quite indifferent. All this was a lie, but a lie for which I did not have the courage to seek any solution other than my own death. And so I remained, in the fur coat that I had not taken off since my return from the Verdurins’, before that twisted body, that figure allegorical of what? Of my death? Of my love? Soon I began to hear her regular breathing. I went and sat down on the edge of her bed to take that soothing cure of breeze and contemplation. Then I withdrew very gently so as not to awaken her.

It was so late that, in the morning, I warned Françoise to tread very softly when she had to pass by the door of Albertine’s room. And so Françoise, convinced that we had spent the night in what she used to call orgies, ironically warned the other servants not to “wake the princess.” And this was one of the things that I dreaded, that Françoise might one day be unable to contain herself any longer, might treat Albertine with insolence, and that this might introduce complications into our life. Françoise was now no longer, as at the time when it distressed her to see Eulalie treated generously by my aunt, of an age to endure her jealousy valiantly. It distorted, paralyzed our old servant’s face to such an extent that at times I asked myself whether she had not, after some outburst of rage, had a slight stroke. Having thus asked that Albertine’s sleep should be respected, I was unable

to sleep myself. I tried to understand Albertine's true state of mind. By that wretched farce that I had played, was it a real peril that I had averted, and, notwithstanding her assurance that she was so happy living with me, had she really felt at certain moments a longing for freedom, or on the contrary was I to believe what she said? Which of these two hypotheses was the truth? If it often happened to me, especially if it were to happen that I must extend an incident in my past life to the dimensions of history when I made an attempt to understand some political event, conversely, that morning, I continued to identify, in spite of all the differences and in an attempt to understand its bearing, our scene overnight with a diplomatic incident that had just occurred.

I had perhaps the right to reason thus. For it was highly probable that the example of M. de Charlus had guided me unwittingly in that sort of lying scene that I had so often seen him enact with such authority; on the other hand, was it, on his part, anything other than an unconscious importation into the domain of his private life of the innate tendency of his Germanic stock, provocative from guile and, from pride, belligerent at need?

Various persons, among them the Prince of Monaco, having suggested the idea to the French government that, if it did not dispense with M. Delcassé,⁵⁵³ a menacing Germany would actually declare war, the minister of foreign affairs had been asked to resign. So that the French government had admitted the hypothesis of an intention to make war upon us if we did not yield. But others thought that it was all a mere "bluff" and that if France had stood firm Germany would not have drawn the sword. No doubt the scenario was not merely different but almost opposite, since the threat of a rupture had never been put forward by Albertine; but a series of impressions had led me to believe that she was thinking of it, as France had been led to believe about Germany. On the other hand, if Germany desired peace, to have provoked in the French government the idea Germany was eager for war was a questionable and dangerous trick. Certainly, my conduct had been adroit enough, if it was the thought that I would never make up my mind to break up with her that provoked in Albertine sudden longings for independence. And was it not difficult to believe that she did not have them, to shut one's eyes to a whole secret existence, directed toward the satisfaction of her vice, judging simply by the anger with which she had learned that I had gone to see the Verdurins, exclaiming: "I thought as much," and going on to reveal everything by saying: "Wasn't Mlle

Vinteuil to be there?" All this was corroborated by Albertine's meeting with Mme Verdurin of which Andrée had informed me. But perhaps all the same these sudden longings for independence (I told myself, when I tried to go against my own instinct) were caused—supposing them to exist—or would eventually be caused by the opposite theory, to wit that I had never had any intention of marrying her, that it was when I made, as though involuntarily, an allusion to our approaching separation that I was telling the truth, that I would whatever happened leave her one day or another, a belief that the scene I had made overnight could then only have strengthened and that might end by engendering in her the resolution: "If this is bound to happen one day or another, better to end everything at once." The preparations for war that the most misleading of adages recommends as the best way to secure the triumph of peace, create first of all the belief in each of the adversaries that the other desires a rupture, a belief that brings the rupture about, and, when it has occurred, this further belief in each of them that it is the other that has sought it. Even if the threat was not sincere, its success encourages a repetition. But the exact point to which a bluff may succeed is difficult to determine; if one party goes too far, the other, which has previously yielded, advances in its turn; the first party, no longer able to change its method, accustomed to the idea that to seem not to fear a rupture is the best way of avoiding one (which is what I had done overnight with Albertine), and moreover driven by pride to succumb rather than yield, perseveres in its threat until the moment when neither can draw back any longer. The bluff may also be blended with sincerity, may alternate with it, and it is possible that what was a game yesterday may become a reality tomorrow. Finally, it may also happen that one of the adversaries is really determined upon war, it might be that Albertine, for example, had the intention of, sooner or later, not continuing this life any longer, or on the contrary that the idea had never even entered her mind and that my imagination had invented the whole thing from start to finish. Such were the different hypotheses that I considered while she lay asleep that morning. And yet as to the last I can say that I never, in the period that followed, threatened to leave Albertine unless in response to a desire on her part for a baleful freedom, a desire that she did not express to me, but that seemed to me to be implied by certain mysterious dissatisfactions, certain words, certain gestures, and for which it was the only possible explanation and for which she refused to give me any other. Even then, quite often, I observed

them without making any allusion to a possible separation, hoping that they were due to a bad mood that would end that same day. But it continued at times without remission for weeks on end, during which Albertine seemed eager to provoke a conflict, as though there had been at the time, in some place more or less remote, pleasures of which she knew, of which her seclusion in my house was depriving her, and which would continue to influence her until they came to an end, like those atmospheric changes which, even by our own fireside, affect our nerves, even when they are occurring as far away as the Balearic Islands.⁵⁵⁴

That morning, while Albertine lay asleep and I was trying to guess what was concealed in her, I received a letter from my mother in which she expressed her anxiety at having heard nothing of my decisions in these words of Mme de Sévigné: "As for me, I am convinced that he will not marry; but then, why trouble this girl whom he will never marry? Why risk making her refuse suitors at whom she will never look again except with scorn? Why disturb the mind of a person whom it would be so easy to avoid?"⁵⁵⁵ This letter from my mother brought me back to earth. "What am I doing, seeking a mysterious soul, interpreting a face and feeling myself surrounded by presentiments that I dare not explore?" I asked myself. "I have been dreaming, the matter is quite simple. I am an indecisive young man, and it is a question of one of those marriages as to which it takes time to find out whether they will happen or not. There is nothing in this peculiar to Albertine." This thought gave me an immense but a short relief. Very soon I said to myself: "One can after all reduce everything, if one regards it in its social aspect, to the most commonplace item of newspaper gossip. From outside, it is perhaps thus that I would look at it. But I know very well that what is true, what at least is also true, is everything that I have thought, is what I have read in Albertine's eyes, the fears that torment me, the problem that I constantly put to myself with regard to Albertine. The story of the hesitant fiancé and the broken engagement may correspond to this, as the review of a theatrical performance made by an intelligent reporter may give us the subject of one of Ibsen's plays. But there is something beyond those facts that are reported. It is true that this other thing exists perhaps, were we able to discern it, in all hesitant fiancés and in all the engagements that drag on, because there is perhaps an element of mystery in our everyday life." It was possible for me to neglect it in the lives of other people, but Albertine's life and my own I was living from within.

Albertine did not say to me after this midnight scene any more than she had said before it: "I know that you do not trust me, I am going to try to dispel your suspicions." But this idea, which she never expressed in words, might have served as an explanation of even her most trivial actions. Not only did she take care never to be alone for a moment, so that I might know what she had been doing if I did not believe her own statements, but even when she had to telephone Andrée, or the garage, or the livery stable or elsewhere, she pretended that it was such a bore to stand about by herself waiting to telephone, what with the time the girls⁵⁵⁶ took to give you your number, and took care that I should be with her at such times, or, failing me, Françoise, as though she were afraid that I might imagine reprehensible conversations by telephone in which she would make mysterious assignments. Alas, all this did not set my mind at rest. I had a day of discouragement. Aimé had sent me back Esther's photograph, with a message that she was not the person. And so Albertine had other intimate friends as well? Who? I sent this photograph back to Bloch. The one that I would have liked to see was the photograph that Albertine had given to Esther. How was she dressed in it? Perhaps in a low-cut dress. Who knew whether they had been photographed together? But I dared not mention it to Albertine (for it would then have appeared that I had not seen the photograph), or to Bloch, since I did not wish him to think that I was interested in Albertine. And this life, which anyone who knew of my suspicions and her bondage would have seen to be agonizing to myself and to Albertine, was regarded from without, by Françoise, as a life of unmerited pleasures of which full advantage was cunningly taken by that "wheedler" and (as Françoise said, using the feminine form far more often than the masculine, for she was more envious of women) "charlatante."⁵⁵⁷ Indeed, as Françoise, by contact with myself, had enriched her vocabulary with new terms, but had adapted them to her own style, she said of Albertine that she had never known a person of such "perfidity," who was so skillful at "drawing my money" by playacting (which Françoise, who was as prone to mistake the particular for the general as the general for the particular and who had but a very vague idea of the various kinds of dramatic art, called "acting a pantomime"). Perhaps I was myself to some extent responsible for this misunderstanding as to the true nature of the life led by Albertine and me owing to the vague confirmations of it which, when I was talking to Françoise, I skillfully let fall, from a desire either to

tease her or to appear, if not loved, at any rate happy. And yet my jealousy, the watch that I kept over Albertine, which I would have given anything for Françoise not to suspect, she was not long in discovering, guided, like the thought-reader who, groping blindfolded, finds the hidden object, by the intuition that she possessed for anything that might be painful to me, which would not allow itself to be turned aside by the lies that I might tell in the hope of putting her off the scent, and also by that hatred of Albertine that urged her—even more than it urged her to believe her enemies more prosperous, more cunning hypocrites than they really were—to discover the secret that might prove their undoing and precipitate their downfall. Françoise certainly never made any scenes with Albertine.

I asked myself whether Albertine, feeling herself watched, would not herself put into effect that separation with which I had threatened her, for life in its changing course makes realities of our fables. Whenever I heard a door open, I felt myself shudder as my grandmother used to shudder in her last moments whenever I rang my bell. I did not believe that she would leave the house without telling me, but it was my unconscious self that thought so, as it was my grandmother's unconscious self that throbbed at the sound of the bell, when she was no longer conscious. One morning indeed, I felt a sudden misgiving that Albertine not only had left the house but had gone for good: I had just heard the sound of a door that seemed to me to be that of her room. On tiptoe I crept toward the room, opened the door, stood upon the threshold. In the dim light the bedclothes bulged in a semicircle, that must be Albertine who, with her body bent, was sleeping with her feet and face to the wall. Only, overflowing the bed, the hair upon that head, abundant and dark, made me realize that it was she, that she had not opened her door, had not stirred, and I felt that this motionless and living semicircle, in which a whole human life was contained, and which was the only thing to which I attached any value, I felt that it was there, in my despotic possession.

But I was acquainted with Françoise's art of insinuation, the advantage that she knew how to derive from a significant setting, and I cannot believe that she resisted the temptation to let Albertine know, day by day, what a humiliating role she was playing in the household, to madden her by a description, cunningly exaggerated, of the confinement to which my mistress was subjected. On one occasion I found Françoise, armed with a huge pair of spectacles, rummaging through my papers and replacing

among them a sheet on which I had jotted down a story about Swann and his utter inability to do without Odette. Had she maliciously left it lying in Albertine's room? Besides, above all Françoise's innuendoes, which had merely been the muttering and perfidious orchestration of it in the bass, it is probable that there must have risen, louder, clearer, more insistent, the accusing and calumnious voice of the Verdurins, irritated to see that Albertine was involuntarily keeping me and that I was voluntarily keeping her away from the little clan.

As for the money that I was spending on Albertine, it was almost impossible for me to conceal it from Françoise, since I was unable to conceal from her any of my expenditures. Françoise had few faults, but those faults had created in her, for their service, positive talents that she often lacked apart from the exercise of those faults. The principal one was her curiosity as to all money spent by us on people other than herself. If I had a bill to pay, a gratuity to give, it was useless my slipping aside, she would find a plate to be put away, a napkin to be picked up, which would give her an excuse for approaching. And however short a time I allowed her, before dismissing her with fury, this woman who had almost lost her sight, who could barely add up a column of figures, guided by the same expert sense that makes a tailor, on catching sight of you, instinctively calculate the price of the fabric of which your coat is made, and even unable to resist fingering it, or makes a painter responsive to a color effect, Françoise stole a glance and calculated instantaneously the amount that I was giving. And when, so that she might not tell Albertine that I was corrupting her chauffeur, I took the initiative and, apologizing for the tip, said: "I wanted to be generous to the chauffeur, I gave him ten francs"; Françoise, pitiless, to whom a glance, that of an old and almost blind eagle, had been sufficient, replied: "No indeed, Monsieur gave him a tip of 43 francs. He told Monsieur that the charge was 45 francs, Monsieur gave him 100 francs, and he handed back only 12 francs." She had had time to see and to reckon the amount of the gratuity that I myself did not know.

If Albertine's object was to restore my peace of mind, she was partly successful; my reason moreover asked nothing better than to prove to me that I had been mistaken as to Albertine's immoral plans, as I had perhaps been mistaken as to her vicious instincts. No doubt I added to the value of the arguments with which my reason furnished me my own desire to find them sound. But, if I was to be fair and to have a chance of perceiving the

truth, unless we admit that it is never known except by presentiment, by a telepathic emanation, must I not say to myself that if my reason, in seeking to bring about my cure, let itself be guided by my desire, on the other hand, in regard to Mlle Vinteuil, Albertine's vices, her intentions to lead a different life, her plan of separation, which were the corollaries of her vices, my instinct, in trying to make me ill, might have allowed itself to be led astray by my jealousy? Besides, her seclusion, which Albertine herself contrived so ingeniously to render absolute, by removing my suffering, removed by degrees my suspicion and I could begin again, when the evening brought back my anxieties, to find in Albertine's presence the consolation of earlier days. Seated beside my bed, she talked to me about one of those dresses or one of those objects that I constantly gave her to try to enhance the comfort of her life and the beauty of her prison, all while fearing that sometime she might share the opinion of that Mme de La Rochefoucauld who, when somebody asked her whether she was not glad to live in so beautiful a home as Liancourt, replied: "There is no such thing as a beautiful prison."

If I had questioned M. de Charlus about old French silver, this was because, when we had been planning to have a yacht—a plan that Albertine decided was impracticable, as I did also whenever I had begun to believe in her virtue, with the result that my jealousy, as it declined, no longer held in check other desires in which it had no place and that also needed money for their satisfaction—we had, just in case, not that she supposed that we would ever have a yacht, asked Elstir for his advice. Now, just as in matters of women's dress, the painter was a refined and meticulous critic of the furnishing of yachts. He would allow only English furniture and old silver. Albertine had at first thought only of dresses and furniture. Now silver had begun to interest her, and this had led Albertine, since our return from Balbec, to read books on the silversmith's art and on the hallmarks of the old craftsmen. But as our old silver was melted twice over, at the time of the Treaty of Utrecht⁵⁵⁸ when the king himself, setting the example to his great nobles, sacrificed his plate, and again in 1789, it is now extremely rare. On the other hand, even though modern silversmiths have managed to copy all this old plate from the designs of Le Pont-aux-Choux,⁵⁵⁹ Elstir considered this modern antique unworthy to enter the dwelling of a woman of taste, even a floating one. I knew that Albertine had read the description of the

marvels that Roettiers had made for Mme du Barry.⁵⁶⁰ If any of these pieces remained, she was dying to see them, and I to give them to her. She had even begun to form a neat collection that she installed with charming taste in a glass case and that I could not look at without affection and alarm, for the art with which she arranged them was that born of patience, ingenuity, nostalgia, the need to forget, in which prisoners excel.

In the matter of dress, what appealed to her most at this time was everything that was made by Fortuny.⁵⁶¹ These Fortuny dressing gowns, one of which I had seen Mme de Guermantes wearing, were those of which Elstir, when he told us about the magnificent garments of the women of Carpaccio's and Titian's day,⁵⁶² had prophesied the imminent return, rising from their ashes, sumptuous, for everything must return in time, as it is written beneath the vaults of Saint Mark's, and as proclaimed, while they drink from the urns of marble and jasper of the Byzantine capitals, by the birds that symbolize at once death and resurrection. As soon as women had begun to wear them, Albertine had remembered Elstir's prophecy, she had desired to have one, and we were to go and choose it. Now these gowns, even if they were not those genuine antiques in which women today seem a little too much "in fancy dress" and which it is preferable to keep as pieces in a collection (I was looking for some of these also, as it happens, for Albertine), could not be said to have the chilling effect of the artificial, the sham antique. Like the theatrical designs of Sert, Bakst, and Benoit,⁵⁶³ who at that moment were re-creating in the Russian ballet the most cherished periods of art, with the aid of works of art impregnated with their spirit and yet original, these Fortuny gowns, faithfully antique but markedly original, brought before the eye like a stage setting, with an even greater evocative power than a décor, since the décor was left to the imagination, that Venice loaded with the gorgeous Orient where they would have been worn, of which they were, even more than a relic in the shrine of Saint Mark, evocative of the sunlight and surrounding turbans, the fragmentary, mysterious and complementary color. Everything of those days had perished, but everything was being reborn, evoked and linked together by the splendor of the scene and the swarming life of the city, by the reappearance, detailed and surviving, of the fabrics worn by the doges' ladies.

I had tried once or twice to obtain advice on this subject from Mme de Guermantes. But the duchess cared little for garments that form a "costume." She herself never looked so well as in black velvet with diamonds. And with regard to gowns like Fortuny's, her advice was not very useful. Besides, I had scruples, if I asked for it, for fear that she might think that I called upon her only when I happened to need her help, whereas for a long time past I had been declining several invitations a week from her. It was not only from her, moreover, that I received them in such profusion. Certainly, she and many other women had always been extremely friendly to me. But my seclusion had undoubtedly multiplied their friendliness tenfold. It seems that in our social life, a minor echo of what occurs in love, the best way for a man to make himself sought after is to withhold himself. A man calculates everything that he can possibly cite to his credit, in order to find favor with a woman; he constantly varies his clothes, pays attention to his appearance, she does not pay him a single one of the attentions that he receives from the other woman to whom, while being unfaithful to her, and in spite of his appearing before her ill-dressed and without any artifice to attract, he has endeared himself forever. Similarly, if a man were to regret that he was not sufficiently courted in society, I would not advise him to pay more calls, to keep an even finer carriage, I would tell him not to accept any invitation, to live shut up in his room, to admit nobody, and that then there would be a line outside his door. Or rather I would not tell him so. For there is a sure way to be sought after that succeeds only like the way to be loved, that is to say if one has not adopted it with that object in view, if, for example, you confine yourself to your room because you are seriously ill, or are supposed to be, or are keeping a mistress shut up with you whom you prefer to society (or for all these reasons at once), this will justify another person, who is not aware of the woman's existence, and simply because you decline to see him, in preferring you to all the people who offer themselves, and attaching himself to you.

"We will have to begin to think soon about your Fortuny dressing gown," I said to Albertine one evening. Surely, to her who had long desired them, who would choose them with me after long and detailed consideration, who had a place reserved for them beforehand not only in her wardrobe but in her imagination, the possession of these gowns, every detail of which, before deciding among so many others, she would carefully examine, was

something more than it would have been to a woman with too much money who has more dresses than she knows what to do with and never even looks at them. And yet, notwithstanding the smile with which Albertine thanked me, saying: "You are too kind," I noticed how weary, and even sad, she was looking. Sometimes while we waited for these gowns to be finished, I used to borrow others of the kind, sometimes indeed merely the fabrics, and would dress Albertine in them, drape them over her; she walked about my room with the majesty of a doge's wife and the grace of a mannequin. But my captivity in Paris was made more burdensome by the sight of these garments, which reminded me of Venice. True, Albertine was far more of a prisoner than I. And it was curious to remark how, through the walls of her prison, destiny, which transforms people, had contrived to pass, to change her in her very essence, and turn the girl I had known at Balbec into a dull and docile captive. Yes, the walls of her prison had not prevented that influence from reaching her; perhaps indeed it was they that had produced it. It was no longer the same Albertine, because she was not, as at Balbec, incessantly in flight on her bicycle, never to be found owing to the number of little beaches where she would go to spend the night with her girlfriends and where moreover her lies made it more difficult to find her; because confined to my house, docile and alone, she was no longer even what at Balbec, when I had succeeded in finding her, she used to be upon the beach, that fugitive, cautious, deceitful creature, whose presence was enlarged by the thought of all those assignations that she was skilled in concealing, which made one love her because they made one suffer, in whom, beneath her coldness to other people and her casual answers, one could feel yesterday's assignation and tomorrow's, and for me a disdainful, cunning thought. Because the sea breeze no longer puffed out her skirts, because, above all, I had clipped her wings, she had ceased to be a winged Victory; she was a burdensome slave of whom I would have liked to be rid.

Then, to change the course of my thoughts, rather than begin a game of cards or checkers with Albertine, I asked her to give me a little music. I remained in bed, and she went and sat down at the end of the room before the pianola,⁵⁶⁴ between the two bookcases. She chose pieces that were quite new or that she had played to me only once or twice, for, beginning to know me better, she had learned that I liked to fix my thoughts only upon what was still obscure to me, and to be able, in the course of these successive renderings, to join together, thanks to the increasing but, alas, distorting and

alien light of my intellect, the fragmentary and interrupted lines of the structure that at first had been almost hidden in the mist. She knew and, I think, understood, the joy that my mind derived, at these first hearings, from this task of modeling a still shapeless nebula. And as she was playing, of all Albertine's multiple tresses I could see but a single loop of black hair in the shape of a heart clinging to the side of her ear like the bow of a Velázquez Infanta.⁵⁶⁵ Just as the volume of that angel musician was constituted by the multiple journeys between the different points in the past that the memory of her occupied within me, and its different abodes, from the visual to the innermost sensations of my being, which helped me to descend into the intimacy of hers, so the music that she played had also a volume, produced by the unequal visibility of the different phrases, accordingly as I had more or less succeeded in throwing light on them and in joining together the lines of a structure that had seemed to me almost completely hidden in the fog. Albertine knew that she pleased me by offering to my thought only things that were still obscure and the challenge of modeling these nebulae. She guessed that at the third or fourth repetition my intellect, having joined, having consequently placed at the same distance, all the parts, and having no longer any effort to expend for them, had reciprocally extended and immobilized them on a uniform plane. She did not, however, proceed at once to a new piece, for, without perhaps having any clear idea of the process that was going on in my mind, she knew that at the moment when the effort of my intelligence had succeeded in dispelling the mystery of a work, it was very rarely that, in compensation, it did not, in the course of its task of destruction, pick up some profitable reflection. And when in time Albertine said: "We might give this roll to Françoise and get her to change it for another one,"⁵⁶⁶ often there was for me a piece of music less in the world, perhaps, but a truth the more.

I was so convinced that it was absurd to be jealous of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, inasmuch as Albertine was making no attempt to see them and among all the plans for a holiday in the country that we had formed had herself rejected Combray, so near to Montjouvain, that, often, what I would ask Albertine to play to me, without its causing me any pain, would be some music by Vinteuil. Once only this music had been an indirect cause of my jealousy. This was when Albertine, who knew that I had heard it performed at Mme Verdurin's by Morel, spoke to me one evening about

him, expressing a keen desire to go and hear him play and to make his acquaintance. This, as it happened, was shortly after I had learned of the letter, unintentionally intercepted by M. de Charlus, from Léa to Morel. I asked myself whether Léa might not have mentioned him to Albertine. The words: “you naughty girl,” “you vicious thing” came back to my horrified mind. But precisely because Vinteuil’s music was in this way painfully associated with Léa—and no longer with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend—when the pain that Léa caused me had subsided, I could then listen to this music without pain; one malady had cured me of the possibility of the others. In the music I had heard at Mme Verdurin’s, phrases that I had not noticed, obscure larvae then indistinct, turned into dazzling architectural structures; and some of them became friends,⁵⁶⁷ whom I had barely distinguished, who at best had appeared to me to be ugly, so that I could never have supposed that they were like those people, antipathetic at first sight, whom we discover to be what they really are only after we have come to know them well. From one state to the other was a real transmutation. On the other hand, phrases that had been quite distinct the first time but that I had not then recognized, I identified now with phrases from other works, such as that phrase from the Sacred Variation for the Organ which, at Mme Verdurin’s, had passed unperceived by me in the septet, where nevertheless, a saint that had stepped down from the sanctuary, it found itself consorting with the composer’s familiar fays.⁵⁶⁸ Finally, the phrase that had seemed to me too little melodious, too mechanical in its rhythm, of the joyful tintinnabulation of bells at noon, had now become my favorite, whether because I had grown accustomed to its ugliness or because I had discovered its beauty. This reaction to the disappointment that great works of art cause at first may in fact be attributed to a weakening of the initial impression or to the effort necessary to lay bare the truth. Two hypotheses that recur in all important questions, questions of the truth of Art, of the truth of the Immortality of the Soul; we must choose between them; and, in the case of Vinteuil’s music, this choice recurred at every moment under a variety of forms. For example, this music seemed to me to be something truer than all the books that I knew. Sometimes I thought that this was due to the fact that what we feel in life, not being felt in the form of ideas, its literary (that is to say an intellectual) translation in giving an account of it, explains it, analyzes it, but does not recompose it as does music, in which the sounds seem to assume the inflexion of our being, to reproduce that interior and

extreme point of our sensations, which is the part that gives us the peculiar exhilaration that we recapture from time to time and that when we say: "What a fine day! What glorious sunshine!" we do not in the least communicate to our neighbor, in whom the same sun and the same weather arouse wholly different vibrations. In Vinteuil's music, there were thus some of those visions that it is impossible to express and almost forbidden to record, since, when at the moment of falling asleep we receive the caress of their unreal enchantment, at that very moment in which reason has already deserted us, our eyes are already sealed, and before we have had time to know not merely the ineffable but the invisible, we are asleep. It seemed to me indeed when I abandoned myself to this hypothesis that art might be real, that it was something even more than the simply nervous joy of a fine day or an opiate night that music can give; a more real, more fruitful exhilaration, to judge at least by what I felt. It is not possible that a piece of sculpture, a piece of music that gives us an emotion that we feel to be more exalted, more pure, more true, does not correspond to some definite spiritual reality, or life would be meaningless. Thus nothing resembled more closely than some such phrase of Vinteuil the peculiar pleasure that I had felt at certain moments in my life, when gazing, for instance, at the steeples of Martinville, or at certain trees along a road near Balbec, or, more simply, in the first part of this book, when I tasted a certain cup of tea. Like that cup of tea, so many sensations of light, the clear sounds, the sonorous colors⁵⁶⁹ that Vinteuil sent to us from the world in which he composed, paraded before my imagination, insistently but too rapidly for me to be able to apprehend it, something that I might compare to the perfumed silkiness of a geranium. Only, whereas, in memory, this vagueness may be, if not thoroughly explored, at any rate fixed precisely, thanks to a guiding line of circumstances that explain why a certain savor has been able to recall to us luminous sensations, the vague sensations given by Vinteuil coming not from a memory but from an impression (like that of the steeples of Martinville), one would have had to find, for the geranium scent of his music, not a material explanation, but the profound equivalent, the unknown and highly colored festival (of which his works seemed to be the scattered fragments, the scarlet-flashing rifts), the mode in which he "heard" the universe and projected it far beyond himself. This unknown quality of a unique world that no other composer had ever made us see, perhaps it is in this, I said to Albertine, that the most authentic proof

of genius consists, even more than in the content of the work itself. “Even in literature?” Albertine inquired. “Even in literature.” And thinking again of the uniformity⁵⁷⁰ of Vinteuil’s works, I explained to Albertine that the great men of letters have never created more than a single work, or rather have never done more than refract through various mediums an identical beauty that they bring into the world. “If it were not so late, my darling,” I said to her, “I would show you this quality in all the writers whose works you read while I am asleep, I would show you the same identity as in Vinteuil. These typical phrases or themes, which you are beginning to recognize as I do, my little Albertine, the same in the sonata, in the septet, in the other works, would be, say for example, in Barbey d’Aurevilly, a hidden reality revealed by a material trace, the physiological blush of the *Ensorcelée*, of Aimée de Spens, of La Clotte, the hand in the *Rideau Cramoisi*, the old manners and customs, the old words, the ancient and peculiar trades behind which there is the Past, the oral history made by the shepherds with the mirror, the noble Norman cities redolent of England and charming as a Scottish village, those who cast curses against which one can do nothing, the Vellini, the Shepherd, a similar sensation of anxiety in a passage, whether it be the wife seeking her husband in *Une Vieille Maîtresse*, or the husband in *L’Ensorcelée* scouring the plain and the *Ensorcelée* herself coming out from mass.⁵⁷¹ There are other typical phrases in Vinteuil like that stonemason’s geometry in the novels of Thomas Hardy.”⁵⁷²

Vinteuil’s phrases made me think of the “little phrase” and I told Albertine that it had been so to speak the national anthem of the love of Swann and Odette,⁵⁷³ “the parents of Gilberte whom you know, I believe. You told me that she was not a bad girl. But didn’t she attempt to have relations with you? She has mentioned you to me.”

“Yes, you see, her parents used to send a carriage to fetch her from school when the weather was bad, and I believe she took me home once and kissed me,” she said, after a momentary pause, laughing as though it were an amusing confession.⁵⁷⁴ “She asked me all of a sudden whether I was fond of women.” (But if she only believed that she remembered that Gilberte had taken her home, how could she say with such precision that Gilberte had asked her this odd question?) “In fact, I don’t know what absurd idea came into my head to fool her, I told her that I was.” (One would have said that

Albertine was afraid that Gilberte had told me this and did not want me to conclude that she was lying to me.) “But we did nothing at all.” (It was strange, if they had exchanged these confidences, that they should have done nothing, especially as, before this, they had kissed, according to Albertine.) “She took me home like that four or five times, perhaps more, and that is all.”

It cost me a great effort not to ply her with further questions, but, mastering myself so as to appear not to be attaching any importance to all this, I returned to Thomas Hardy. “Do you remember the stonemasons in *Jude the Obscure*,⁵⁷⁵ in *The Well-Beloved*, the blocks of stone that the father hews out of the island coming in boats to be piled up in the son’s workshop where they are turned into statues;⁵⁷⁶ in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* the parallelism of the tombs, and also the parallel line of the boat, and the railway coaches containing the lovers and the dead woman;⁵⁷⁷ the parallelism between *The Well-Beloved*, where the man is in love with three women, and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* where the woman is in love with three men,⁵⁷⁸ and in short all those novels that can be superimposed one upon another like the houses piled up vertically on the rocky soil of the island? I cannot summarize the greatest writers like this in a moment’s talk, but you would see in Stendhal a certain sense of altitude linked to the life of the spirit: the lofty place in which Julien Sorel is a prisoner, the tower on the summit of which Fabrice is imprisoned, the belfry in which the Abbé Blanès pores over his astrology and from which Fabrice has such a magnificent bird’s-eye view.⁵⁷⁹ You told me that you had seen some of Vermeer’s paintings, you must have realized that they are fragments of an identical world, that it is always, however great the genius with which they have been re-created, the same table, the same carpet, the same woman, the same novel and unique beauty, an enigma at that epoch in which nothing resembles or explains it, if we don’t try to find similarities in subjects but to isolate the distinctive impression that is produced by the color. Well, then, this novel beauty remains identical in all Dostoyevsky’s works,⁵⁸⁰ the Dostoyevsky woman (as distinctive as a Rembrandt woman) with her mysterious face, whose engaging beauty changes abruptly, as though her apparent good nature had been but playacting, to a terrible insolence (although at heart it seems that she is more good than bad), isn’t she always the same, whether it be Nastasya Filippovna⁵⁸¹ writing love letters to Aglaya⁵⁸² and telling her that she hates

her, or in a visit that is wholly identical with this—as also with the one where Nastasya Filippovna insults Ganya's⁵⁸³ family—Grushenka,⁵⁸⁴ as charming in Katerina Ivanovna's house as the latter had supposed her to be terrible, then suddenly revealing her malevolence by insulting Katerina Ivanovna (although Grushenka is good at heart); Grushenka, Nastasya, figures as original, as mysterious not merely as Carpaccio's courtesans but as Rembrandt's Bathsheba.⁵⁸⁵ Mind you, he certainly did not know only that dual, radiant face, with its sudden outbursts of pride that make a woman seem other than she is ("You are not like that," Myshkin⁵⁸⁶ says to Nastasya during the visit to Ganya's family, and Alyosha⁵⁸⁷ might have said the same to Grushenka during the visit to Katerina Ivanovna). And, on the other hand, when he wants 'ideas for paintings,' they are always stupid and would at best result in paintings where Munkacsy⁵⁸⁸ wanted to see a condemned man represented at the moment when, etc., or the Virgin Mary at the moment when, etc. But to come back to the new kind of beauty that Dostoyevsky brought to the world, as, in Vermeer, there is the creation of a certain soul, of a certain color of fabrics and places, so there is in Dostoyevsky creation not only of people but of their homes, and the house of the murder in *Crime and Punishment*, with its dvornik,⁵⁸⁹ is not as marvelous as the masterpiece of the house of murder in Dostoyevsky, that somber house, so long, and so high, and so vast, of Rogozhin in which he kills Nastasya Filippovna.⁵⁹⁰ That novel and terrible beauty of a house, that novel and dual beauty of a woman's face, that is the unique thing that Dostoyevsky has given to the world, and the comparisons that literary critics may make, between him and Gogol,⁵⁹¹ or between him and Paul de Kock,⁵⁹² are of no interest, being external to this secret beauty. Besides, if I have said to you that it is, from one novel to another, the same scene, it is in the compass of a single novel that the same scenes, the same characters reappear if the novel is at all long. I could illustrate this to you easily in *War and Peace*, and a certain scene in a carriage . . ."⁵⁹³

"I didn't want to interrupt you, but now that I see that you are leaving Dostoyevsky, I am afraid I might forget. My dear boy, what was it you meant the other day when you said: 'It is, so to speak, the Dostoyevsky side of Mme de Sévigné.' I must confess that I did not understand. It seems to me so different."

“Come, my darling girl, let me give you a kiss to thank you for remembering so well what I say, you will go back to the pianola afterward. And I must admit that what I said was rather stupid. But I said it for two reasons. The first is a special reason. What I meant was that Mme de Sévigné, like Elstir, like Dostoyevsky, instead of presenting things in their logical sequence, that is to say beginning with the cause, shows us first of all the effect, the illusion that strikes us. That is how Dostoyevsky presents his characters. Their actions seem to us as misleading as those effects in Elstir’s pictures where the sea appears to be in the sky. We are quite surprised to find that some sullen person is really the best of men, or vice versa.”

“Yes, but give me an example in Mme de Sévigné.”

“I admit,” I answered her with a laugh, “that it’s a bit farfetched, but still I could find examples.”⁵⁹⁴

“But did he ever murder anyone, Dostoyevsky? The novels of his that I know might all be called *The Story of a Crime*. It is an obsession with him, it is not natural that he should always be talking about it.”

“I don’t think so, my dear Albertine, I know little about his life. It is certain that, like everyone else, he was acquainted with sin, in one form or another, and probably in a form that the laws condemn. In that sense he must have been more or less criminal, like his heroes—not that they are altogether heroes, for that matter—who are found guilty with extenuating circumstances. And perhaps it wasn’t necessary for him to be a criminal himself. I am not a novelist; it is possible that creative writers are tempted by certain forms of life of which they have no personal experience. If I come with you to Versailles, as we arranged, I will show you the portrait of the ultraspectable man, the best of husbands, Choderlos de Laclos, who wrote the most appallingly perverse book,⁵⁹⁵ and facing it the portrait of Mme de Genlis,⁵⁹⁶ who wrote moral tales and was not content with betraying the Duchesse d’Orléans, but tormented her by turning her children against her. I admit all the same that in Dostoyevsky this preoccupation with murder is something extraordinary that makes him very alien to me. I am astonished enough when I hear Baudelaire say:

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l’incendie . . .

*C’est que notre âme, hélas! n’est pas assez hardie.*⁵⁹⁷

But I can at least assume that Baudelaire is not sincere. Whereas Dostoyevsky . . . All that sort of thing seems to me as remote from myself as possible, unless there are parts of myself of which I know nothing, for we realize our own nature only in course of time. In Dostoyevsky I find the deepest wells of discernment but only into certain isolated regions of the human soul. But he is a great creator. For one thing, the world that he describes does really appear to have been created by him. All those buffoons who keep on reappearing, like Lebedyev, Karamazov, Ivolgin, Segrev,⁵⁹⁸ that incredible procession, are a humanity more fantastic than the one that peoples Rembrandt's *Night Watch*.⁵⁹⁹ And perhaps it is fantastic only in the same way, by the effect of lighting and costume, and is quite normal really. In any case it is at the same time full of profound and unique truths, which belong only to Dostoyevsky. They almost suggest, those buffoons, some trade or calling that no longer exists, like certain characters in the old drama, and yet how they reveal true aspects of the human soul! What I find so boring is the solemn manner in which people talk and write about Dostoyevsky. Have you ever noticed the part that self-esteem and pride play in his characters? One would say that, to him, love and the most passionate hatred, goodness and treachery, timidity and insolence, are merely two states of a single nature, their self-esteem, their pride preventing Aglaya, Nastasya, the Captain whose beard Mitya pulls,⁶⁰⁰ Krasotkin,⁶⁰¹ Alyosha's enemy-friend, from showing themselves in their true colors. But there are many other great passages as well. I know very few of his books. But is it not a sculpturesque and simple theme, worthy of the most classical art, a frieze interrupted and resumed on which the tale of vengeance and expiation is unfolded, the crime of old Karamazov getting the poor idiot with child, the mysterious, animal, unexplained impulse by which the mother, herself unwittingly the instrument of an avenging destiny, obeying also obscurely her maternal instinct, feeling perhaps a combination of resentment and physical gratitude toward her seducer, comes to give birth to her child in old Karamazov's garden?⁶⁰² This is the first episode, mysterious, grand, august like the Creation of Woman in the sculptures at Orvieto.⁶⁰³ And as counterpart, the second episode more than twenty years later, the murder of old Karamazov, the infamy brought upon the Karamazov family by this son of the idiot, Smerdyakov,⁶⁰⁴ followed shortly afterward by another action, as mysteriously sculpturesque and

unexplained, of a beauty as obscure and natural as that of the childbirth in old Karamazov's garden, Smerdyakov hanging himself, his crime accomplished. As for Dostoyevsky, I was not straying so far from him as you thought when I mentioned Tolstoy, who imitated him a great deal. In Dostoyevsky there is, concentrated and fretful, a great deal of what was to blossom later on in Tolstoy. There is, in Dostoyevsky, that proleptic gloom of the primitives that their disciples will brighten and dispel."

"My dear boy, what a bore it is that you are so lazy. Just look at your view of literature, so far more interesting than the way we were made to study it; the essays that they used to make us write about *Esther*:⁶⁰⁵ 'Monsieur,' you remember," she said with a laugh, less from a desire to make fun of her masters and herself than from the pleasure of finding in her memory, in our common memory, a recollection that was already almost venerable.

But while she was speaking, and I continued to think of Vinteuil, it was the other, the materialist hypothesis, that of there being nothing,⁶⁰⁶ that in turn presented itself to my mind. I began to doubt, I said to myself that after all it might be the case that, if Vinteuil's phrases seemed to be the expression of certain states of the soul analogous to the one that I had experienced when I tasted the madeleine that had been dipped in a cup of tea,⁶⁰⁷ there was nothing to assure me that the vagueness of such states was a sign of their profundity rather than of our not having learned yet to analyze them, so that there need be nothing more real in them than in other states. And yet that happiness, that sense of certainty in happiness while I was drinking the cup of tea, or when I smelled in the Champs-Élysées a smell of moldering wood, was not an illusion. In any case, whispered the spirit of doubt, even if these states are more profound than others that occur in life, and defy analysis for the very reason that they bring into play too many forces that we have not yet taken into consideration, the charm of certain phrases of Vinteuil's music makes us think of them because it too defies analysis, but this does not prove that it has the same profundity; the beauty of a phrase of pure music can easily appear to be the image of or at least akin to an intellectual impression that we have received, but simply because it is unintellectual. And why then do we suppose to be especially profound those mysterious phrases that haunt certain works and this septet by Vinteuil? It was not, however, his music alone that Albertine played me;

the pianola was to us at times like a scientific magic lantern (historical and geographical) and on the walls of this room in Paris, supplied with inventions more modern than my room at Combray,⁶⁰⁸ I would see, accordingly as Albertine played me Rameau⁶⁰⁹ or Borodin,⁶¹⁰ extend before me now an eighteenth-century tapestry sprinkled with cupids and roses, now the Eastern steppe in which sounds are muffled by boundless distances and the soft carpet of snow. And these fleeting decorations were as it happened the only ones in my room, for if, at the time of inheriting my Aunt Léonie's fortune, I had vowed to become a collector like Swann, to buy paintings, statues, all my money was spent on buying horses, an automobile, dresses for Albertine. But did not my room contain a work of art more precious than all these—Albertine herself? I looked at her. It was strange to me to think that it was she, she whom I had for so long thought it impossible even to know, who now, a wild beast tamed, a rosebush to which I had acted as trainer, as the framework, the trellis of its life, was seated thus, day by day, at home, by my side, before the pianola, with her back to my bookcase. Her shoulders, which I had seen bowed and resentful when she was carrying her golf clubs, were leaning against my books. Her shapely legs, which on the first day I had with good reason imagined as having worked throughout her adolescence the pedals of a bicycle, now rose and fell alternately upon those of the pianola, upon which Albertine, who had acquired an elegance that made me feel her more my own, because it was from myself that it came, pressed her shoes of cloth of gold. Her fingers, at one time accustomed to handlebars, now rested upon the keys like those of a Saint Cecilia.⁶¹¹ Her throat the curve of which, seen from my bed, was strong and full, at that distance and in the lamplight appeared more rosy, less rosy, however, than her face inclined in profile, to which my gaze, issuing from the innermost depths of myself, charged with memories and burning with desire, added such a brilliancy, such an intensity of life that its relief seemed to stand out and turn with almost the same magic power as on the day, in the hotel at Balbec, when my vision was clouded by my overpowering desire to kiss her;⁶¹² I prolonged each of its surfaces beyond what I was able to see and beneath what concealed it from me and made me feel all the more strongly—eyelids that half hid her eyes, hair that covered the upper part of her cheeks—the relief of those superimposed planes. Her eyes shone like, in a matrix in which the opal is still embedded, the two

facets that alone have as yet been polished, which, become more brilliant than metal while remaining more resistant than light, reveal, in the midst of the blind matter that encumbers them, as it were the mauve, silken wings of a butterfly placed under glass. Her dark, curling hair, presenting a different appearance whenever she turned to ask me what she was to play next, now a splendid wing, sharp at the tip, broad at the base, black, feathered and triangular, now weaving the relief of its curls in a strong and varied chain, full of crests, of watersheds, of precipices, with its incisions so rich and so multiple, seemed to exceed the variety that nature normally realizes and to correspond rather to the desire of a sculptor who accumulates difficulties in order to bring into greater prominence the suppleness, the fire, the molding, the life of his execution, and brought out more strongly, by interrupting in order to resume them, the animated curve, and, as it were, the rotation of the smooth and rosy face, of the polished dullness of a piece of painted wood. And, by contrast with all this relief, by the harmony also that united them with her, which had adapted her attitude to their form and purpose, the pianola that half concealed her like an organ case, the bookcase, the whole of that corner of the room seemed to be reduced to nothing more than the lighted sanctuary, the shrine of this angel musician, a work of art that, presently, by a charming magic, was to detach itself from its niche and offer to my kisses its precious, rosy substance. But no, Albertine was in no way to me a work of art. I knew what it meant to admire a woman in an artistic fashion, I had known Swann.⁶¹³ For my own part, moreover, I was, no matter who the woman might be, incapable of doing so, having no sort of power of detached observation, never knowing what it was that I beheld, and I had been amazed when Swann added retrospectively for me an artistic dignity—by comparing her, as he liked to do with gallantry to her face, to some portrait by Luini,⁶¹⁴ by finding in her attire the gown or the jewels of a painting by Giorgione⁶¹⁵—to a woman who had seemed to me to be devoid of interest. Nothing of that sort with me. The pleasure and the pain that I derived from Albertine never took, in order to reach me, the line of taste and intellect; indeed, to tell the truth, when I began to regard Albertine as an angel musician glazed with a marvelous patina whom I congratulated myself upon possessing, it was not long before I found her uninteresting; I soon became bored in her company, but these moments were of brief duration; we love only that in which we pursue something inaccessible, we

love only what we do not possess, and very soon I returned to the conclusion that I did not possess Albertine. In her eyes I saw pass now the hope, now the memory, perhaps the regret of joys that I could not guess, which in that case she preferred to renounce rather than tell me of them, and which, gathering no more of them than certain gleams in her pupils, I no more perceived than does the spectator who has been refused admission to the theater, and who, his face glued to the glass panes of the door, can take in nothing of what is happening on the stage. (I do not know whether this was the case with her, but it is a strange thing, and, so to speak, a testimony by the most incredulous to their belief in good, this perseverance in falsehood shown by all those who deceive us. It would be no good our telling them that their lie hurts us more than a confession, it would be no good their realizing this for themselves, they would start lying again a moment later, to remain consistent with their telling us how much we mean to them. Similarly, an atheist who values his life will let himself be burned alive rather than allow any contradiction of the popular idea of his courage.) During these hours, I used sometimes to see hover over her face, in her gaze, in her pout, in her smile, the reflection of those inner visions the contemplation of which made her on these evenings unlike her usual self, remote from me to whom they were denied.

“What are you thinking about, my darling?”

“Why, nothing.” Sometimes, in answer to this reproach that she told me nothing, she would at one moment tell me things that she was not unaware that I knew as well as anyone (like those statesmen who will never give you the least bit of news but speak to you instead of what you could read for yourself in the papers the day before), at another would describe without the least precision, in a sort of false confidence, bicycle rides that she had taken at Balbec, the year before our first meeting. And as though I had guessed correctly long ago, when I inferred from this that she must be a girl who was allowed a great deal of freedom, who went on long jaunts, the mention of those rides insinuated between Albertine’s lips the same mysterious smile that had captivated me in those first days on the esplanade at Balbec. She spoke to me also of the excursions that she had made with some girlfriends through the Dutch countryside, of returning to Amsterdam in the evening, at a late hour, when a dense and happy crowd of people almost all of whom she knew, thronged the streets, the towpaths of the canals, of which I felt that I could see reflected in Albertine’s brilliant eyes as in the

glancing windows of a fast-moving carriage, the innumerable, flickering fires. Since what is called esthetic curiosity would deserve rather the name of indifference in comparison with the painful, unwearying curiosity that I felt as to the places in which Albertine had lived, as to what she might have been doing on a particular evening, her smiles, the expressions in her eyes, the words that she had uttered, the kisses that she had received! No, never would the jealousy that I had felt one day of Saint-Loup,⁶¹⁶ if it had persisted, have caused me this immense uneasiness. This love of woman for woman was something too unfamiliar; nothing enabled me to form with certainty an accurate idea of its pleasures, its quality. How many people, how many places (even places that did not concern her directly, vague places where she might have tasted pleasure), how many scenes (wherever there was a crowd, where people could brush against her) had Albertine—like a person who, shepherding all her escort, a whole company, past the barrier in front of her, secures their admission to the theater—from the threshold of my imagination or of my memory, where I paid no attention to them, introduced into my heart! Now the knowledge that I had of them was internal, immediate, spasmodic, painful. Love is space and time made perceptible to the heart. And yet perhaps, had I myself been entirely faithful, I might not have suffered because of infidelities that I would have been incapable of conceiving, whereas what it tortured me to imagine in Albertine was my own perpetual desire to find favor with new women, to begin new romances, was to suppose her guilty of the glance that I had been unable to resist casting, the other day, even when I was by her side, at the young bicyclists seated at tables in the Bois de Boulogne.⁶¹⁷ As there is no knowledge, one might almost say that we can feel no jealousy except of ourselves. Observation counts for little. It is only from the pleasure that we ourselves have felt that we can derive knowledge and pain.

At moments, in Albertine's eyes, in the sudden inflammation of her cheeks, I felt as it were a gust of warmth pass furtively into regions more inaccessible to me than the sky, in which Albertine's memories, unknown to me, lived and moved. Then this beauty that, when I thought of the successive years in which I had known Albertine, whether on the beach at Balbec or in Paris, I found that I had but recently discovered in her, and that consisted in the fact that my mistress existed on so many planes and embodied so many days that had passed, this beauty became almost heartrending. Then beneath that blushing face I felt that there yawned like a

gulf the inexhaustible expanse of the evenings when I had not known Albertine. I might, if I chose, take Albertine on my knee, take her head in my hands; I might caress her, pass my hands slowly over her, but, just as if I had been handling a stone that encloses the salt of immemorial oceans or the light of a star, I felt that I was touching no more than the sealed envelope of a person who inwardly reached to infinity. How I suffered from that position to which we are reduced by the carelessness of nature which, when instituting the division of bodies, never thought of making possible the interpenetration of souls! And I became aware that Albertine was not even for me (for if her body was in the power of mine, her thoughts escaped the grasp of my thoughts) the marvelous captive with whom I had thought to enrich my home, while I concealed her presence there as completely, even from the friends who came to see me and never suspected that she was at the end of the corridor, in the room next to my own, as did that man of whom nobody knew that he kept sealed in a bottle the Princess of China;⁶¹⁸ urging me with a cruel and fruitless pressure to a quest⁶¹⁹ of the past, she resembled, if anything, a mighty goddess of Time. And if I had to waste, for her sake, years of my life,⁶²⁰ my fortune—and provided that I can say to myself, which is by no means certain, alas, that she herself lost nothing—I have nothing to regret. No doubt solitude would have been better, more fruitful, less painful. But if I had led the life of a collector as Swann counseled, the joys of which M. de Charlus reproached me with not knowing, when, with a blend of wit, insolence, and good taste, he said to me: “How ugly your rooms are!” what statues, what paintings long pursued, at length possessed, or even, to put it in the best light, contemplated with detachment, would, like the little wound that healed quickly enough, but which the unconscious clumsiness of Albertine, of people generally, or of my own thoughts, was never long in reopening, have given me access beyond my own boundaries, upon a path that, private though it be, opens on to the highway along which passes what we learn to know only from the day on which it has made us suffer: the life of other people?

Sometimes there was such a beautiful moonlight that, an hour after Albertine had gone to bed, I would go to her bedside to tell her to look at it through the window. I am certain that it was for this reason that I went to her room and not to assure myself that she was really there. What likelihood was there of her being able, even if she had wished, to escape? That would

have required an improbable collusion with Françoise. In the dim room, I could see nothing except, on the whiteness of the pillow, a slender diadem of dark hair. But I could hear Albertine's breathing. Her sleep was so deep that I hesitated at first to go as far as the bed; I sat down on the edge of it; her sleep continued to flow with the same murmur. What I find it impossible to express is how merry her awakenings were. I embraced her, shook her. At once she ceased to sleep, but, without even a moment's interval, broke out in a laugh, saying as she twined her arms around my neck: "I was just beginning to wonder whether you were coming," and she laughed tenderly and lightheartedly. You would have said that her charming head, when she slept, was filled with nothing but gaiety, affection, and laughter. And in waking her I had merely, as when we cut a fruit, released the gushing juice that quenches our thirst.

Meanwhile winter was at an end; the fine weather returned, and often when Albertine had just bidden me goodnight, my room, my curtains, the wall above the curtains being still quite dark, in the nuns' garden next door I could hear, rich and precious in the silence like a harmonium in church, the modulation of an unknown bird which, in the Lydian mode,⁶²¹ was already chanting matins, and into the midst of my darkness flung the rich dazzling note of the sun that it could see. Soon the nights grew shorter still and before what had been the hour of daybreak, I could see already stealing above my window curtains the daily increasing whiteness of the dawn. If I resigned myself to allowing Albertine to continue to lead this life, in which, notwithstanding her denials, I felt that she had the impression of being a prisoner, it was only because I was sure that on the following day I would be able to set myself, at the same time to work and to leave my bed, to go out of doors, to prepare our departure for some property that we would buy and where Albertine would be able to lead more freely and without anxiety on my account, the life of the country or the seaside, of boating or hunting, that appealed to her.

Only, the next day, that past that I loved and detested by turns in Albertine, it would so happen that (as, when it is the present, between himself and us, everyone, from calculation, or courtesy, or pity, sets to work to weave a curtain of falsehood that we mistake for the truth), retrospectively, one of the hours that composed it, and even those that I thought I knew, offered me all of a sudden an aspect that she no longer made any attempt to conceal from me and that was then quite different from

the aspect in which it had previously appeared to me. Behind some look in her eyes, in place of the honest thought that I had formerly supposed that I could read in it, was a desire, unsuspected hitherto, that revealed itself, alienating from me a new region of Albertine's heart that I had believed to be assimilated to my own. For example, when Andrée left Balbec in the month of July, Albertine had never told me that she was to see her again shortly, and I supposed that she had seen her even sooner than she expected since, because of the great unhappiness that I had felt at Balbec, on that night of the fourteenth of September, she had made me the sacrifice of not remaining there and of returning at once to Paris.⁶²² When she had arrived there on the fifteenth, I had asked her to go and see Andrée and had said to her: "Was she pleased to see you again?" Now one day Mme Bontemps had called, bringing something for Albertine; I saw her for a moment and told her that Albertine had gone out with Andrée: "They have gone for a drive in the country."

"Yes," replied Mme Bontemps, "Albertine is always ready to go to the country. Three years ago, for example, she simply had to go, every day, to the Buttes-Chaumont." At the name Buttes-Chaumont, a place where Albertine had told me that she had never been, my breath stopped for a moment. The truth is the most cunning of enemies. It launches its attacks on the points of our heart where we were not expecting them, and where we have prepared no defense. Had Albertine been lying to her aunt, then, when she said that she went every day to the Buttes-Chaumont, or to myself, more recently, when she told me that she did not know the place? "Fortunately," Mme Bontemps went on, "that poor Andrée will soon be leaving for a more bracing country, for the real country, she needs it badly, she is not looking at all well. It is true that she did not have an opportunity this summer of getting the fresh air she needs. Just think, she left Balbec at the end of July, expecting to go back there in September, and then her brother put his knee out, and she was unable to go back." So Albertine was expecting her at Balbec and had concealed this from me. It is true that it was all the more kind of her to have offered to return to Paris with me. Unless . . ." Yes, I remember Albertine's mentioning it to me" (this was untrue). "When did the accident occur, again? I am not very clear about it."

"Why, to my mind, it occurred in the very nick of time, because a day later the lease of the villa would have begun, and Andrée's grandmother would have had to pay a month's rent for nothing. He hurt his leg on the

fourteenth of September, she was in time to telegraph to Albertine on the morning of the fifteenth that she was not coming, and Albertine was in time to warn the agent. A day later, the lease would have run on to the middle of October.”

And so, no doubt, when Albertine, changing her mind, had said to me: “Let’s go this evening,” what she saw with her mind’s eye was an apartment unknown to me, that of Andrée’s grandmother, where, as soon as we returned, she would be able to see the friend whom, without my suspecting it, she had thought she would be seeing again in a few days at Balbec. The kind words that she had used, in offering to return to Paris with me, in contrast to her stubborn refusal a little earlier, I had sought to attribute to a reawakening of her good nature. They were simply and solely the effect of a change that had occurred in a situation that we do not know, and which is the whole secret of the variation of the conduct of the women who are not in love with us. They obstinately refuse to give us a rendezvous for the following day, because they are tired, because their grandfather insists on their dining with him: “But come later,” we insist. “He keeps me very late. He may want to see me home.” The simple truth is that they have a rendezvous with some man whom they like. Suddenly, he is no longer free. And they come to tell us how sorry they are to have disappointed us, that the grandfather can go and hang himself, that there is nothing in the world to keep them from remaining with us. I ought to have recognized these phrases in what Albertine had said to me on the day of my departure from Balbec. But to interpret those phrases I would have needed not only to recognize them but to remember at the time two particular traits of Albertine’s character.

Two character traits of Albertine’s now recurred to my mind, one to console me, the other to make me wretched, for we find a little of everything in our memory; it is a sort of pharmacy, a chemical laboratory, in which our groping hand comes to rest now upon a sedative drug, now upon a dangerous poison. The first, the consoling feature was that habit of making a single action serve the pleasure of several persons, that multiple utilization of whatever she did, which was characteristic of Albertine.⁶²³ It was quite in keeping with her character, when she returned to Paris (the fact that Andrée was not coming back might have made it inconvenient for her to remain at Balbec, without this meaning that she could not do without Andrée), to derive from that single journey an opportunity of touching two

people each of whom she genuinely loved, myself, by making me believe that she was coming in order not to let me be alone, so that I would not be unhappy, out of devotion to me, Andrée by persuading her that, as soon as there was no longer any question of her coming to Balbec, she herself did not wish to remain there a moment longer, that she had prolonged her stay there only in the hope of seeing Andrée and was now hurrying back to join her. Now, Albertine's departure with me was such an immediate sequel, on the one hand to my grief, to my desire to return to Paris, on the other hand to Andrée's telegram, that it was quite natural that Andrée and I, unaware, respectively, she of my grief, I of her telegram, should have supposed that Albertine's departure from Balbec was the effect of the one cause that each of us knew, which indeed it followed at so short an interval and so unexpectedly. And in this case, I might still believe that the thought of keeping me company had been Albertine's real object, while she had not wanted to neglect an opportunity of thereby establishing a claim to Andrée's gratitude. But, unfortunately, I remembered almost at once another of Albertine's characteristics, which was the vivacity with which she was gripped by the irresistible temptation of a pleasure. And so I recalled how, when she had decided to leave, she had been so impatient to get to the train, how she had pushed past the hotel manager who, as he tried to detain us, might have made us miss the omnibus, the shrug of connivance that she had given me, by which I had been so touched, when, on the twister, M. de Cambremer had asked us whether we could not "postpone it by a week." Yes, what she saw before her eyes at that moment, what made her so feverishly anxious to leave, what she was so impatient to see again was that uninhabited apartment that I had once visited, the home of Andrée's grandmother, a luxurious apartment left in charge of an old footman, facing south, but so empty, so silent, that the sun appeared to have spread dust sheets over the sofa, the armchairs of the room in which Albertine and Andrée would ask the respectful caretaker, perhaps unsuspecting, perhaps an accomplice, to allow them to rest for a while.

I could always see it now, empty, with a bed or a sofa, and a maid who was either a dupe or an accomplice, that room, to which, whenever Albertine seemed pressed for time and serious, she set off to meet her friend, who had doubtless arrived there before her since her time was more her own. I had never before given a thought to that apartment that now possessed for me a horrible beauty. The unknown element in the lives of

other people is like that in nature, which each scientific discovery merely reduces but does not abolish. A jealous lover exasperates the woman with whom he is in love by depriving her of a thousand unimportant pleasures. But those pleasures that are the keystone of her life she conceals in a place where, in the moments in which he thinks that he is showing the most intelligent perspicacity and third parties are keeping him most closely informed, he never dreams of looking.

But Andrée, at least, was going to leave Paris. But I did not want Albertine in a position to despise me for having been the dupe of herself and Andrée. One of these days, I would tell her. And thus I would force her perhaps to speak to me more frankly, by showing her that I was informed, all the same, of the things that she concealed from me. But I did not wish to mention it to her for the moment, first of all because, so soon after her aunt's visit, she would guess from where my information came, would block that source, and would not be worried about other, unknown sources. Also because I did not want to risk, so long as I was not absolutely certain of keeping Albertine for as long as I chose, arousing in her too frequent irritations that might make her want to leave me. It is true that if I reasoned, sought the truth, prognosticated the future on the basis of her words, which always approved all my plans and assured me how much she loved this life, of how little her seclusion deprived her, I had no doubt that she would remain with me always. I was indeed greatly dismayed by the thought, I felt that life and the world, which I had never really tasted, were passing me by, in exchange for a woman in whom I could no longer find anything new. I could not even go to Venice, where, while I lay in bed, I would be too tormented by the fear of the advances that might be made to her by the gondolier, the people in the hotel, the Venetian women. But if I reasoned, on the contrary, on the other hypothesis, the one that rested not on Albertine's words, but on silences, looks, blushes, sulks, and even bursts of anger, which I could quite easily have shown her to be unfounded and that I preferred to appear not to notice, then I said to myself that she was finding this life unbearable, that all the time she found herself deprived of what she loved, and that inevitably she would leave me one day. All that I wished, if she did so, was that I might choose the moment when it would not be too painful to me, and also that it might be in a season when she could not go to any of the places in which I imagined her debaucheries, either in Amsterdam, or with Andrée, whom she would see again, it was true, a few

months later. But, in the meantime, I would have grown calm and their meeting would leave me unmoved. In any case, I must wait before I could think of it until I was cured of the slight relapse that had been caused by my discovery of the reasons for which Albertine, at an interval of a few hours, had been determined not to leave, and then to leave Balbec immediately. I must allow time for the symptoms to disappear which could only go on diminishing if I learned nothing new, but which were still too acute not to render more painful, more difficult, an act of separation recognized now as inevitable, but in no sense urgent, and one that would be better performed in "cold blood." Of this choice of the right moment I was the master, for if she decided to leave me before I had made up my mind, at the moment when she informed me that she had had enough of this life, there would always be time for me to think of a way to counter her arguments, to offer her greater freedom, to promise her some great pleasure in the near future which she herself would be eager to await, at worst, if I could find no recourse except to her heart, to assure her of my grief. I was therefore quite at my ease from this point of view, without, however, being very logical with myself. For, in the hypotheses in which I left out of account precisely the things that she said and announced, I supposed that, when it was a question of her leaving me, she would give me her reasons beforehand, would allow me to counter and defeat them.

I felt that my life with Albertine was, on the one hand, when I was not jealous, mere boredom, and on the other hand, when I was jealous, constant suffering. Supposing that there was any happiness in it, it could not last. I possessed the same spirit of wisdom that had inspired me at Balbec, when, on the evening when we had been happy together after Mme de Cambremer's call, I wanted to leave her, because I knew that by prolonging our intimacy I would gain nothing. Only, even now, I imagined that the memory that I would keep of her would be like a sort of vibration prolonged by a pedal from the last moment of our parting. And so I intended to choose a pleasant moment, so that it might be it that continued to vibrate in me. It must not be too difficult, I must not wait too long, I must be prudent. And yet, having waited so long, it would be madness not to wait a few days longer, until an acceptable moment should offer itself, rather than risk seeing her depart with that same sense of revolt that I had felt in the past when Mamma left my bedside without bidding me goodnight, or when she said goodbye to me at the station. At all costs I multiplied the

favours that I was able to bestow upon her. As for the Fortuny gowns, we had at length decided upon one in blue and gold lined with pink that was just ready. And I had ordered, all the same, the other five that she had relinquished with regret, out of preference for this one.

Yet with the coming of spring, two months after her aunt's conversation with me, I lost my temper one evening. It was the very evening on which Albertine had put on for the first time the indoor gown in gold and blue by Fortuny which, by reminding me of Venice, made me feel all the more strongly what I was sacrificing for Albertine, who felt no corresponding gratitude toward me. If I had never seen Venice, I had dreamed of it incessantly since those Easter holidays that, when still a boy, I had been going to spend there, and earlier still, since the Titian prints and Giotto⁶²⁴ photographs that Swann had given me long ago at Combray.⁶²⁵ The Fortuny gown that Albertine was wearing that evening seemed to me the tempting phantom of that invisible Venice. It teemed with Arabic ornaments, like the Venetian palaces hidden like sultanas behind a screen of pierced stone, like the bindings in the Ambrosian library,⁶²⁶ like the columns from which the Oriental birds that symbolized alternatively life and death were repeated in the shimmering fabric, of an intense blue that, as my gaze extended over it, was changed into a malleable gold, by those same transmutations that, before an advancing gondola, change into flaming metal the azure of the Grand Canal. And the sleeves were lined with a cherry pink that is so peculiarly Venetian that it is called Tiepolo pink.⁶²⁷

In the course of the day, Françoise had let fall in my hearing that Albertine was satisfied with nothing, that when I sent word to her that I would be going out with her, or that I would not be going out, that the automobile would come to fetch her, or would not come, she almost shrugged her shoulders and would barely give a polite answer. That evening, when I felt that she was in a bad mood, and when the first heat of summer had made me irritable, I could not restrain my anger and reproached her with her ingratitude. "Yes, you can ask anybody," I shouted at the top of my voice, quite beside myself, "you can ask Françoise, it is common knowledge." But immediately I remembered how Albertine had once told me how terrifying she found me when I was angry, and had applied to myself the lines from *Esther*:

Jugez combien ce front irrité contre moi

*Dans mon âme troublée a dû jeter d'émoi . . .
Hélas! sans frissonner quel coeur audacieux*

*Soutiendrait les éclairs qui partent de vos yeux?*⁶²⁸

I felt ashamed of my violence. And, to make reparation for what I had done, without, however, acknowledging defeat, so that my peace might be an armed and redoubtable peace, while at the same time I thought it as well to show her once again that I was not afraid of a rupture so that she might not feel tempted to provoke it: "Forgive me, my little Albertine, I am ashamed of my violence, I don't know how to apologize. If we are not able to get on together, if we are to be obliged to part, it must not be this way, it would not be worthy of us. We will part, if part we must, but first of all I wish to beg your pardon most humbly and with all my heart." I decided that, to atone for my outburst and also to make certain of her intention to remain with me for some time to come, at any rate until Andrée should have left Paris, which would be in three weeks, it would be as well, next day, to think of some pleasure greater than any that she had yet had and fairly slow in its fulfilment; also, since I was going to wipe out the offense that I had given her, perhaps I would do well to take advantage of this moment to show her that I knew more about her life than she supposed. The resentment that she would feel would be removed the next day by my kindness, but the warning would remain in her mind. "Yes, my little Albertine, forgive me if I was violent. I am not quite as much to blame as you think. There are wicked people in the world who are trying to make us quarrel; I have always refrained from mentioning this, as I did not wish to torment you. But sometimes I am driven out of my mind by certain accusations." And wishing to make the most of the fact that I was going to be able to show her that I was in the know about the departure from Balbec, I went on, "For example, you knew that Mlle Vinteuil was expected at Mme Verdurin's that afternoon when you went to the Trocadéro."

She blushed: "Yes, I knew that."

"Can you swear to me that it was not in order to renew your relations with her?"

"Why, of course I can swear. Why do you say *renew*, I never had any relations with her, I swear it."

I was very distressed to hear Albertine lie to me like this, deny the facts that her blush had made all too evident. Her mendacity appalled me. And yet, as it contained a protestation of innocence that, almost unconsciously, I

was prepared to accept, it hurt me less than her sincerity when, after I had asked her: "Can you at least swear to me that the pleasure of seeing Mlle Vinteuil again had nothing to do with your eagerness to go that afternoon to the Verdurins' party?" she replied: "No, that I cannot swear. It would have been a great pleasure to see Mlle Vinteuil again."

A moment earlier, I had been angry with her because she concealed her relations with Mlle Vinteuil, and now her admission of the pleasure that she would have felt in seeing her again turned my bones to water. It is true that when Albertine said to me, when I had returned from the Verdurins', "Wasn't Mlle Vinteuil to be there?" she had revived all my suffering by proving to me that she knew of her coming. But in the meantime I had no doubt reasoned thus: "She knew of her coming, which gave her no pleasure at all, but since she must have realized afterward that it was the revelation that she knew someone with such a bad reputation as Mlle Vinteuil that had made me desperate enough at Balbec to consider suicide, she did not want to mention it. And now here she was being obliged to admit that the thought of seeing Mlle Vinteuil gave her pleasure. Moreover, the mysterious way in which she had hidden her wish to go to the Verdurins' should have given me sufficient proof. But I had not given the matter enough thought. And so, while saying to myself now: "Why does she only half-confess? It's even more stupid than wicked and sad," I was so crushed that I did not have the heart to pursue the matter, regarding which I was not in a good position since I had no telling evidence to produce, and to recover my ascendancy I hurriedly turned to the subject of Andrée, which would enable me to fluster Albertine by means of the crushing revelation of Andrée's telegram. "At any rate, they are tormenting me at present, they are persecuting me with reports of your relations with Andrée."

"With Andrée?" she cried, her face ablaze with anger. And astonishment or the desire to appear astonished made her open her eyes wide. "How charming! And may one know who has been telling you these pretty tales? May I be allowed to speak to these persons, to learn from them upon what they are basing their slanders?"

"My little Albertine, I do not know, the letters are anonymous, but from people whom you would perhaps have no difficulty in finding" (this to show her that I did not believe that she would try) "for they must know you quite well. The last one, I must admit (and I mention it because it deals with a trifle, and there is nothing at all unpleasant in it), made me furious all the

same. It informed me that if, on the day when we left Balbec, you first of all wished to remain there and then decided to go, that was because in the meantime you had received a letter from Andrée telling you that she was not coming.”

“I know quite well that Andrée wrote to tell me that she wasn’t coming, in fact she telegraphed; I can’t show you the telegram because I didn’t keep it, but it wasn’t that day; besides, even if it had been that day, what difference do you suppose it could make to me whether Andrée came to Balbec or not?”

The words “what difference do you suppose it could make to me” were a proof of anger and that “it did make” some difference but were not necessarily a proof that Albertine had returned to Paris solely from a desire to see Andrée. Whenever Albertine saw one of the real or alleged motives of one of her actions discovered by a person to whom she had pleaded a different motive, she became angry, even if the person was the one for whose sake she had really performed the action. That Albertine believed that this information about what she had been doing did not come to me out of the blue in anonymous letters but was eagerly solicited by me, could never have been deduced from the words that she uttered next, in which she appeared to accept my story of the anonymous letters, but rather from her look of anger with me, an anger that appeared to be merely the explosion of her previous ill humor, just as the espionage in which, by this hypothesis, she must suppose that I had been indulging would have been only the culmination of a surveillance of all her actions, which she had suspected for a long time. Her anger extended even to Andrée herself, and deciding no doubt that from now on I would never be calm again even when she went out with Andrée: “Besides, Andrée exasperates me. She is a deadly bore. She’s coming back tomorrow. I never want to go anywhere with her again. You can tell that to the people who informed you that I came back to Paris for her sake. Suppose I were to tell you that after all the years I’ve known Andrée, I couldn’t even describe her face to you, I’ve hardly ever looked at it!”

Now at Balbec, in that first year, she had said to me: “Andrée is lovely.” It is true that this did not mean that she had had amorous relations with her, and indeed I had never heard her speak at that time save with indignation of any relations of that sort. But couldn’t she have changed even without being aware that she had changed, never supposing that her amusements with a

girlfriend were the same thing as the immoral relations, not clearly defined in her own mind, which she condemned in other women? Was it not possible also that this same change, and this same unconsciousness of change, might have occurred in her relations with me, with me whose kisses she had repulsed at Balbec with such indignation, kisses that afterward she was to give me of her own accord every day, which, I hoped, she would give me for a long time to come, and which she was going to give me in a moment?

“But, my darling, how do you expect me to tell them when I do not know who they are?”

This answer was so forceful that it ought to have melted the objections and doubts that I saw crystallized in Albertine’s pupils. But it left them intact. I was now silent, and yet she continued to gaze at me with that persistent attention that we give to someone who has not finished speaking. I asked her forgiveness once more. She replied that she had nothing to forgive me. She had become very gentle again. But, beneath her sad and troubled features, it seemed to me that a secret had taken shape. I knew quite well that she could not leave me without warning me; besides she could neither wish to leave me (it was in a week’s time that she was to try on the new Fortuny gowns), nor decently do so, since my mother was returning to Paris at the end of the week and her aunt also. Why, since it was impossible for her to depart, did I repeat to her several times that we would be going out together the next day to look at some Venetian glass that I wanted to give her, and why was I comforted when I heard her say that that was agreed? When it was time for her to say goodnight to me and I kissed her, she did not behave as usual, but turned away—it was barely a minute or two since I had been thinking how pleasant it was that she now gave me every evening what she had refused me at Balbec—she did not return my kiss. One would have said that, having quarreled with me, she was not prepared to give me a token of affection that might later on have appeared to me a treacherous denial of that quarrel. One would have said that she was attuning her actions to that quarrel, and yet with moderation, whether in order not to announce it, or because, while breaking off her carnal relations with me, she wished still to remain my friend. I kissed her then a second time, pressing to my heart the shimmering and golden azure of the Grand Canal and the mating birds, symbols of death and resurrection. But for the second time she drew away and, instead of returning my kiss,

withdrew with the sort of instinctive and direful obstinacy of animals that feel the hand of death. This presentiment that she seemed to be expressing overpowered me also and filled me with so anxious a fear that when she had reached the door I did not have the heart to let her go, and called her back, "Albertine," I said to her, "I am not at all sleepy. If you don't want to go to sleep yourself, you might stay here a little longer, if you like, but I don't really mind, and I don't on any account want to tire you." I felt that if I had been able to make her undress, and to have her there in her white nightgown, in which she seemed more rosy, warmer, in which she excited my senses more keenly, the reconciliation would have been more complete. But I hesitated for an instant, for the blue border of her gown added to her face a beauty, an illumination, a sky without which she would have seemed to me more harsh. She came back slowly and said to me very sweetly, and still with the same downcast, sorrowful expression: "I can stay as long as you like, I am not sleepy." Her reply calmed me, for, so long as she was in the room, I felt that I could think about the future and that moreover it implied friendship, obedience, but of a certain sort, which seemed to me to be limited by that secret that I sensed behind her sorrowful gaze, her altered manner, partly in spite of herself, partly no doubt to attune them beforehand to something that I did not know. I felt that, all the same, I needed only to have her all in white, with her throat bare, in front of me, as I had seen her at Balbec in bed, to find the courage that would oblige her to yield. "Since you are so kind as to stay here a moment to console me, you ought to take off your gown, it is too hot, too stiff, I dare not approach you for fear of crumpling that fine fabric and we have those fateful birds between us. Undress, my darling."

"No, I couldn't possibly take off this dress here. I will undress in my own room presently."

"Then you won't even come and sit down on my bed?"

"Why, of course."

She remained, however, a little way from me, by my feet. We talked. Suddenly we heard the regular cadence of a plaintive call. It was the pigeons beginning to coo. "That proves that day has come already," said Albertine; and, her brows almost knitted, as though she missed, by living with me, the joys of the fine weather, "Spring has begun, if the pigeons have returned." The resemblance between their cooing and the crow of the cock was as profound and as obscure as, in Vinteuil's septet, the

resemblance between the theme of the adagio that is built on the same key theme as the opening and closing movements, but so transformed by differences of tonality, tempo, etc., that the lay person, if he opens a book on Vinteuil, is astonished to find that they are all three based on the same four notes, four notes, moreover, that he can pick out with one finger on the piano without recapturing anything of the three passages. So this melancholy passage performed by the pigeons was a sort of cockcrow in the minor key, which did not soar up into the sky, did not rise vertically, but, regular as the braying of a donkey, enveloped in sweetness, went from one pigeon to another along a single horizontal line, and never raised itself, never changed its lateral plaint into that joyous call that had been uttered so often in the allegro of the introduction and in the finale. I know that I then uttered the word "death," as though Albertine were about to die. It seems that events are larger than the moment in which they occur and cannot be contained entirely in it. Certainly, they overflow into the future through the memory that we retain of them, but they demand a place also in the time that precedes them. One may say that we do not then see them as they will be, but in memory are they not modified also?

When I saw that she deliberately refrained from kissing me, realizing that I was merely wasting my time, that it was only after the kiss that the soothing and veritable minutes would begin, I said to her: "Goodnight, it is too late," because that would make her kiss me and we could then continue. But after saying: "Goodnight, try to sleep well," she contented herself with a kiss on the cheek, exactly as she had done twice already. This time I dared not call her back, but my heart beat so violently that I could not lie down again. Like a bird that flies from one end of its cage to the other, I wavered between anxiety that Albertine might leave and a state of comparative calm. This calm was produced by the argument that I kept on repeating several times every minute: "She cannot go without warning me, she never said anything about going," and I was more or less calmed. But at once I said to myself: "And yet what if tomorrow I find that she has gone! My very anxiety must be founded upon something; why did she not kiss me?" At this my heart ached horribly. Then it was slightly soothed by the argument that I advanced once more, but I ended with a headache, so incessant and monotonous was this agitation of my thoughts. There are thus certain mental states, and especially anxiety, which, as they offer us only two alternatives, are in a way as atrociously circumscribed as a merely physical

pain. I perpetually repeated the argument that justified my anxiety and the one that proved it false and reassured me, within as narrow a space as the sick man who explores without ceasing, by an internal movement, the organ that is making him suffer, and withdraws for an instant from the painful spot to return to it a moment later. Suddenly, in the silence of the night, I was startled by a noise apparently insignificant which, however, filled me with terror, the sound of Albertine's window being violently opened. When I heard no further sound, I asked myself why this noise had caused me such alarm. In itself there was nothing so extraordinary; but I probably gave it two interpretations that terrified me equally. In the first place it was one of the conventions of our life together, since I was afraid of drafts, that nobody must ever open a window at night. This had been explained to Albertine when she came to stay in the house, and although she was convinced that this was a mania on my part and thoroughly unhealthy, she had promised me that she would never break the rule. And she was so timorous about everything that she knew to be my wish, even if she disapproved of it, that I knew that she would have gone to sleep surrounded by the fumes from a chimney fire rather than open her window, just as, however important the circumstances, she would not have awakened me in the morning. It was only one of the minor conventions of our life, but from the moment when she violated it without having said anything to me, did not that mean that she no longer needed to take precautions, that she would violate them all just as easily? Besides, the noise had been violent, almost ill-bred, as though she had flung open the window, crimson with rage, and saying: "This life is stifling me. I don't care, I must have air!" I did not exactly say all this to myself, but I continued to think, as of a presage more mysterious and more funereal than the hoot of an owl, of that sound of the window that Albertine had opened. Filled with an agitation such as I had not felt perhaps since the evening at Combray when Swann had been dining downstairs,⁶²⁹ I paced the corridor for a long time, hoping, by the noise that I made, to attract Albertine's attention, hoping that she would take pity on me and would call me to her, but I heard no sound come from her room. At Combray, I had asked my mother to come. But with my mother I feared only her anger; I knew that I would not diminish her affection by showing her mine. That made me reluctant to call out to Albertine. Gradually, I began to feel that it was too late. She must long have been asleep. I went back to bed. In the morning, as soon as I awoke, since no one ever came to

my room, whatever might have happened, without a summons, I rang for Françoise. And at the same time I thought: "I must speak to Albertine about a yacht that I mean to have built for her." As I took my letters, I said to Françoise without looking at her: "Presently I will have something to say to Mlle Albertine; is she out of bed yet?" "Yes, she got up early." I felt arise in me, as in a sudden gust of wind, a thousand anxieties, which I was unable to keep in suspense in my chest. The tumult there was so great that I was quite out of breath as though caught in a tempest. "Ah! But where is she just now?" "I expect she's in her room." "Ah! Good! Very well, I will see her presently." I breathed again, she was here, my agitation subsided. Albertine was there, it was almost a matter of indifference to me whether she was or not. Besides, had it not been absurd to suppose that she could possibly not be there? I fell asleep, but, in spite of my certainty that she would not leave me, into a light sleep and of a lightness related to her alone. For by the sounds that could be connected only with work in the courtyard, while I heard them vaguely in my sleep, I remained unmoved, whereas the slightest rustle that came from her room, when she left it, or noiselessly returned, pressing the bell so gently, made me start, ran through my whole body, left me with a throbbing heart, although I had heard it in a profound slumber, just as my grandmother in the last days before her death,⁶³⁰ when she was plunged in an immobility that nothing could disturb and that the doctors called a coma, would begin, I was told, to tremble for a moment like a leaf when she heard the three rings with which I was in the habit of summoning Françoise, and which, even when I made them softer, during that week, so as not to disturb the silence of the death-chamber, nobody, Françoise assured me, could mistake for anyone else's ring, because of a way that I had, and was quite unconscious of having, of pressing the bell. Had I then entered myself into my last agony? Was this the approach of death?

That day and the next we went out together, since Albertine refused to go out again with Andrée. I never even mentioned the yacht to her. These excursions had completely restored my peace of mind. But she had continued at night to embrace me in the same new way, which left me furious. I could interpret it now in no other way than as a method of showing me that she was cross with me, which seemed to me perfectly absurd after my constant kindnesses to her. And so, no longer receiving from her even those carnal satisfactions on which I depended, finding her positively ugly in her ill humor, I felt all the more keenly my deprivation of

all the women and of the travels for which these first warm days reawakened my desire. Thanks no doubt to the scattered memory of the forgotten assignations that I had had, while still an adolescent, with women, beneath trees already in full leaf, this springtime region in which the endless round of our dwelling place traveling through the seasons had halted for the last three days, beneath a clement sky, and from which all the roads pointed toward picnics in the country, boating parties, pleasure trips, seemed to me to be the land of women just as much as it was the land of trees, and the land in which a pleasure that was everywhere offered became permissible to my convalescent strength. Resigning myself to idleness, resigning myself to chastity, to tasting pleasure only with a woman whom I did not love, resigning myself to remaining shut up in my room, to not traveling, all this was possible in the old world in which we had been only yesterday, in the empty world of winter, but was no longer possible in this new leafy universe, in which I had awakened like a young Adam faced for the first time with the problem of existence, of happiness, who is not bowed down beneath the weight of the accumulation of previous negative solutions. Albertine's presence weighed upon me, I looked at her, sweet and sullen, feeling that it was a pity that we had not separated. I wanted to go to Venice, I wanted in the meantime to go to the Louvre to look at Venetian paintings and to the Luxembourg⁶³¹ to see the two Elstirs which, as I had just heard, the Princesse de Guermantes had recently sold to that gallery, those that I had so greatly admired at the Duchesse de Guermantes's, the *Pleasures of the Dance* and the *Portrait of the X Family*.⁶³² But I was afraid that, in the former, certain lascivious poses might give Albertine a desire, a regretful longing for popular rejoicings, making her say to herself that perhaps a certain life that she had never led, a life of fireworks and country taverns, was not so bad. Already, in anticipation, I was afraid that, on the Fourteenth of July, she would ask me to take her to a popular ball and I dreamed of some impossible event that would cancel the national holiday. And besides, there were also present, in Elstir's paintings, certain nude female figures in the leafy landscapes of the Midi that might make Albertine think of certain pleasures, although Elstir himself (but would she not degrade his work?) had seen in them nothing more than sculptural beauty, or rather the beauty of snowy monuments, which is assumed by the bodies of women seated among verdure.⁶³³

And so I resigned myself to abandoning that pleasure and made up my mind to go to Versailles. Albertine, who no longer wanted to go out with Andrée, had remained in her room, reading, in her Fortuny dressing gown. I asked her if she would like to go with me to Versailles. She had the charming quality of being always ready for anything, perhaps because she had been accustomed in the past to spend half her time as the guest of other people, and, just as she had made up her mind to come to Paris, in two minutes, she said to me: "I can come as I am if we won't be getting out of the car." She hesitated for a moment between two Fortuny cloaks in which to conceal her dressing gown—as she might have hesitated between two friends in the choice of an escort—chose one of dark blue, an admirable choice, thrust a pin into a hat. In a minute, she was ready, before I had put on my overcoat, and we went to Versailles. This very promptitude, this absolute docility left me more reassured, as though indeed, without having any precise reason for anxiety, I had been in need of reassurance. "After all I have nothing to fear, she does everything that I ask, in spite of the noise of her window the other night. The moment I spoke of going out, she flung that blue cloak over her gown and out she came, that is not what a rebel would have done, a person who was no longer on friendly terms with me," I said to myself as we went to Versailles. We stayed there a long time. The whole sky was formed of that radiant and slightly pale blue that the wayfarer lying in a field sees at times above his head, but so uniform, so intense, that he feels that the blue of which it is composed has been utilized without any alloy and with such an inexhaustible richness that one might delve more and more deeply into its substance without encountering an atom of anything but that same blue. I thought of my grandmother who—in human art as in nature—loved grandeur, and who used to enjoy gazing at the steeple of Saint-Hilaire soaring into the same blue. Suddenly I felt once again a longing for my lost freedom on hearing a noise that I did not at first recognize and that my grandmother would also have loved. It was like the buzz of a wasp. "Look," said Albertine, "there is an airplane, high up in the sky, so high."⁶³⁴ I looked in every direction but, like the wayfarer lying in a field, could see only, unmarred by any black spot, the unbroken pallor of the unalloyed blue. I continued nevertheless to hear the humming of the wings, which suddenly came into my field of vision. Up there a pair of tiny wings, dark and flashing, punctured the continuous blue of the unalterable sky. I had at last been able to attach the buzzing to its cause, to that little

insect throbbing up there in the sky, probably more than six thousand feet above me; I could see it hum. Perhaps at a time when distances by land had not yet been habitually shortened by speed as they are today, the whistle of a passing train a mile off was endowed with that beauty that now and for some time to come will stir our emotions in the hum of an airplane six thousand feet up, with the thought that the distances traversed in this vertical journey are the same as those on the ground, and that in this other direction, where the measurements appeared different to us because the access seemed impossible, an airplane at about six thousand feet is no farther away than a train a mile off, is indeed nearer, the identical trajectory occurring in a purer medium, with no separation of the traveler from his starting point, just as on the sea or across the plains, in calm weather, the wake of a ship that is already far away or the breath of a single zephyr will furrow the ocean of water or of wheat.

I wanted something to eat. We stopped at a big pâtisserie, situated almost outside the town, and which at that time enjoyed a certain vogue. A lady was leaving the place and asked the proprietress for her things. And after the lady had gone, Albertine cast repeated glances at her as though she wished to attract her attention while the other was putting away cups, plates, petits fours, for it was already late. She approached me only if I asked for something. And what happened then was that as the proprietress, who moreover was extremely tall, was standing up while she waited on us and Albertine was seated beside me, each time, Albertine, in an attempt to attract her attention, raised vertically toward her a sunny gaze that compelled her to raise her pupils to an even higher angle since, the proprietress being directly in front of us, Albertine was unable to temper the angle with the obliquity of her gaze. She was obliged, without raising her head unduly, to make her eyes ascend to that disproportionate height at which the proprietress's eyes were situated. Out of consideration for me, Albertine quickly lowered her eyes, and, as the proprietress had paid her no attention, began again. This led to a series of vain imploring elevations before an inaccessible deity. Then the proprietress had nothing left to do but to clear a big table, next to ours. Now Albertine's gaze need only be lateral. But never once did the proprietress's eyes come to rest upon my mistress. This did not surprise me, for I knew that the woman, with whom I was slightly acquainted, had lovers, although she was married, but managed to conceal her intrigues completely, which astonished me greatly in view of

her prodigious stupidity. I studied the woman while we finished eating. Concentrating on her work, she was almost impolite to Albertine, in the sense that she did not have a single glance to exchange for all those of my mistress, which moreover were in no way improper. She continued to clear things, went on putting things away, without letting anything distract her. The counting and putting away of the coffee spoons, the fruit knives, might have been entrusted not to this large and handsome woman, but, by a laborsaving device, to a mere machine, and you would not have seen so complete an isolation from Albertine's attention, and yet she did not lower her eyes, did not let herself become absorbed, allowed her eyes, her charms to shine in an undivided attention to her work. It is true that if this woman had not been a particularly stupid person (not only was this her reputation, but I knew it from experience), this detachment might have been a supreme proof of her cleverness. And I know very well that the stupidest person, if his desire or his pocket is involved, can, in that sole instance, emerging from the nullity of his stupid life, adapt himself immediately to the workings of the most complicated machinery; all the same, this would have been too subtle a supposition in the case of a woman as idiotic as the proprietress. Her idiocy even assumed the improbable form of impoliteness! Never once did she look at Albertine, whom, after all, she could not help seeing. It was not very flattering for my mistress, but, when all was said and done, I was delighted that Albertine should receive this little lesson and should see that frequently women paid no attention to her. We left the pâtisserie, got into our car, and were already on our way home when I was seized by a sudden regret that I had not taken the proprietress aside and begged her on no account to tell the lady who had come out of the shop as we were going in my name and address, which she must know perfectly well because of the orders I had often left with her. It was indeed undesirable that the lady should be enabled thus to learn, indirectly, Albertine's address. But I felt that it would take too long to turn back for so small a matter, and that I would appear to be attaching too great an importance to it in the eyes of the idiotic and mendacious proprietress. I decided, finally, that I would have to return there, in a week's time, to make this request, and that it was a great bore, since one always forgets half the things that one has to say, to have to do even the simplest things in installments.

We returned home very late in the night while, here and there, by the roadside, a pair of red breeches pressed against a skirt revealed an amorous couple. Our car passed in through the Porte Maillot.⁶³⁵ For the monuments of Paris had been substituted, pure, linear, without depth, a drawing of the monuments of Paris, as though in an attempt to recall the appearance of a city that had been destroyed. But, around about this picture, there rose so delicately the pale-blue mounting in which it was framed that one's greedy eyes sought everywhere for a further trace of the delicious shade that was to sparingly measure out to them: the moon was shining. Albertine admired the moonlight. I dared not tell her that I would have admired it more if I had been alone, or in quest of an unknown woman. I repeated to her lines of poetry or passages of prose about moonlight, pointing out to her how from "silvery" which it had been at one time, it had turned "blue" in Chateaubriand,⁶³⁶ in the Victor Hugo of "Eviradnus"⁶³⁷ and "La Fête chez Thérèse,"⁶³⁸ to become in turn yellow and metallic in Baudelaire⁶³⁹ and Leconte de Lisle.⁶⁴⁰ Then, reminding her of the image that is used for the crescent moon at the end of "Booz endormi,"⁶⁴¹ I talked to her about the whole poem.

I cannot tell you how densely, now that I come to think of it, Albertine's life was covered in a network of alternative, fugitive, often contradictory desires. No doubt falsehood complicated this still further, for, as she retained no accurate memory of our conversations, when she had said to me: "Ah! That's a pretty girl, and a good golfer," and I had asked the girl's name, she had answered with that detached, universal, superior air of which no doubt there is always enough and to spare, for all liars of this category borrow it for a moment when they do not wish to answer a question, and it never fails them: "Ah! That I don't know" (with regret at her inability to enlighten me). "I never knew her name, I used to see her on the golf course, but I didn't know what she was called"; if, a month later, I said to her: "Albertine, you remember that pretty girl you mentioned to me, who plays golf so well." "Ah, yes," she would answer without thinking: "Émilie Daltier, I don't know what has become of her." And the lie, like a line of earthworks, was carried back from the defense of the name, now captured, to the possibilities of meeting her again. "Oh, I can't tell you, I never knew her address. I can't think of anyone who could tell you. Oh, no! Andrée never knew her. She wasn't one of our little band, now so scattered." At

other times the lie took the form of a base admission: "Ah! If I had three hundred thousand francs a year . . ." She bit her lip. "Well? What would you do then?" "I would ask you," she said, kissing me as she spoke, "to allow me to remain with you always. Where else could I be so happy?" But even when one took her lies into account, it was incredible how spasmodic her life was, how fugitive her strongest desires. She would be mad about a person whom, three days later, she would refuse to see. She could not wait for an hour while I sent out for canvas and colors, for she wished to start painting again. For two whole days she was impatient, almost shed the tears, quickly dried, of an infant that has just been weaned from its nurse. And this instability of her feelings with regard to people, things, occupations, arts, places, was in fact so universal that, if she did love money, which I do not believe, she cannot have loved it for longer than anything else. When she said: "Ah! If I had three hundred thousand francs a year!" or even if she expressed a pernicious but very transient thought, she could not have retained it any longer than the idea of going to Les Rochers, [642](#) of which she had seen an engraving in my grandmother's edition of *Mme de Sévigné*, of meeting an old friend from the golf course, of going up in an airplane, of going to spend Christmas with her aunt, or of taking up painting again.

"After all, since neither of us is really hungry, we might have looked in at the Verdurins'," Albertine said to me, "this is their day and their hour."

"But I thought you were angry with them?"

"Oh! There are all sorts of stories about them, but really they're not so bad as all that. Madame Verdurin has always been very nice to me. Besides, one can't keep on quarreling all the time with everybody. They have their faults, but who hasn't?"

"You are not properly dressed, you would have to go home and dress, that would make us very late."

"Yes, you are right, let's just go home," replied Albertine with that marvelous docility that continued to amaze me.

The fine weather that night made a leap forward as the mercury in the thermometer darts upward in the heat. In the early-rising mornings of spring that followed, I could hear the streetcars moving, through a cloud of perfumes, in an air with which the prevailing warmth became more and more blended until it reached the solidification and density of noon. In my

bedroom where it was cooler when the unctuous air had succeeded in glazing and isolating the smell of the washstand, the smell of the wardrobe, the smell of the sofa, simply by the sharpness with which, vertical and erect, they stood out in adjacent but distinct slices, in a pearly chiaroscuro that added a softer glaze to the shimmer of the curtains and the blue satin armchairs, I saw myself, not by a mere caprice of my imagination, but because it was physically possible, following in some new quarter of the suburbs, like that in which Bloch's house at Balbec was situated, the streets blinded by the sun, and finding in them not the dull butchers' shops and the white freestone facings, but the country dining room that I could reach in no time, and the smells that I would find there on my arrival, the smell of the bowl of cherries and apricots, the smell of cider, the smell of Gruyère cheese, held in suspense in the luminous congelation of shadow that they delicately vein like the heart of an agate, while the knife-rests of prismatic glass scatter rainbows across the room or paint the waxcloth here and there with peacock eyes.

Like a wind that swells in a regular progression, I heard with joy an automobile beneath the window. I smelled its odor of gasoline. That smell may seem regrettable to the oversensitive (who are always materialists and for whom it spoils the country), and to certain thinkers (materialists after their own fashion also) who, believing in the importance of facts, imagine that man would be happier, capable of higher flights of poetry, if his eyes were able to perceive more colors, his nostrils to distinguish more scents, a philosophical distortion of the naïve thought of those who believe that life was finer when men wore, instead of the black coats of today, sumptuous costumes. But to me (just as an aroma, unpleasant perhaps in itself, of naphthalene and vetiver would have thrilled me by bringing back to me the blue purity of the sea on the day of my arrival at Balbec),⁶⁴³ this smell of gasoline that, together with the smoke from the exhaust of the car, had so often melted into the pale azure, on those scorching days when I used to drive from Saint-Jean de la Haise⁶⁴⁴ to Gourville,⁶⁴⁵ as it had accompanied me on my excursions during those summer afternoons when I had left Albertine painting, called into blossom now on either side of me, for all that I was lying in my darkened bedroom, cornflowers, poppies, and red clover, intoxicated me like a country scent, not circumscribed and fixed, like the one that is spread before the hawthorns and, retained in its unctuous and dense elements, floats with a certain stability before the hedge, but like a

scent before which the roads took flight, the landscape changed, châteaux came hurrying to meet me, the sky turned pale, my strength was increased tenfold, a scent that was like a symbol of elastic motion and power, and that revived the desire that I had felt at Balbec, to enter the cage of steel and crystal, but this time not to go any longer on visits to familiar houses with a woman whom I knew too well, but to make love in new places with a woman unknown. A scent that was accompanied at every moment by the call of the horns of passing automobiles, which I set to words like a military trumpet call: “Parisian, get up, get up, come out and picnic in the country, and take a boat on the river, under the trees, with a pretty girl; get up, get up!” And all these reveries were so agreeable that I congratulated myself upon the “stern decree” that prescribed that until I had rung my bell, no “timid mortal,” whether Françoise or Albertine, should dare come in to disturb me “within this palace” where

. . . une majesté terrible

*Affecte à mes sujets de me rendre invisible.*⁶⁴⁶

But all of a sudden the scene changed; it was the memory, no longer of old impressions, but of an old desire, quite recently reawakened by the Fortuny gown in blue and gold, that spread itself before me, another spring, a spring not leafy at all but suddenly stripped, on the contrary, of its trees and flowers by the name that I had just uttered to myself: “Venice,” a decanted spring, which is reduced to its essential qualities, and expresses the lengthening, the warming, the gradual maturing of its days by the progressive fermentation, no longer of an impure soil, but of a blue and virgin water, springlike without bud or blossom, which could answer the call of May only by gleaming facets, carved by that month, harmonizing exactly with it in the radiant, unaltering nakedness of its dusky sapphire. And so, no more than the seasons to its unflowering inlets of the sea, do modern years bring any change to the Gothic city; I knew it, I could not imagine it, but this was what I longed to contemplate with the same desire that long ago, when I was a boy, in the very ardor of my departure had shattered the strength necessary for the journey; I wished to find myself face to face with my Venetian imaginings, to contemplate how that divided sea enclosed in its meanderings, like the streams of Ocean,⁶⁴⁷ an urbane and refined civilization, but one that, isolated by their azure belt, had developed by itself, had had its own schools of painting and architecture, to admire

that fabulous garden of fruits and birds in colored stone, flowering in the midst of the sea that kept it refreshed, splashed with its tide against the base of the columns and, on the bold relief of the capitals, like a dark blue eye watching in the shadows, laid patches, which it kept perpetually moving, of light. Yes, I must go, the time had come. Now that Albertine no longer appeared to be angry with me, the possession of her no longer seemed to me a treasure in exchange for which we are prepared to sacrifice every other. For perhaps we would have done so only to rid ourself of a grief, an anxiety that were now appeased. We have succeeded in jumping through the calico hoop through which we thought for a moment that we would never be able to pass. We have weakened the storm, brought back the smiling serenity. The agonizing mystery of a hatred without any known cause, and perhaps without end, is dispelled. Henceforward we find ourselves once more face to face with the problem, momentarily thrust aside, of a happiness that we know to be impossible. Now that life with Albertine had become possible once again, I felt that I could derive nothing from it but misery, since she did not love me; better to part from her in a pleasant moment with her consent, a moment that I would prolong in memory. Yes, this was the moment; I must make quite certain of the date on which Andrée was leaving Paris, use all my influence with Mme Bontemps to make sure that at that moment Albertine would not be able to go either to Holland or to Montjouvain. We would come, were we better able to analyze our loves, to see that we often find women attractive only because of the counterpoise of the men with whom we have to compete for them; the counterpoise removed, the charm of the woman declines. We have a painful and salutary example of this in the predilection that men have for the women who, before coming to know them, have gone astray, for those women whom they feel to be sinking in perilous quicksand and whom they must spend the whole period of their love in rescuing; an example after the fact, on the other hand, and one that is not at all dramatic, in the man who, conscious of a decline in his affection for the woman he loves, spontaneously applies the rules that he has deduced, and, to make sure of his not ceasing to love the woman, places her in a dangerous environment where he is obliged to protect her daily. (The opposite of the men who insist on a woman's retiring from the stage even when it was because of her being on the stage that they fell in love with her.)

When in this way there would be no drawbacks to Albertine's departure, I would have to choose a fine day like this—and there would be plenty of them before long—one when she would have ceased to matter to me, when I would be tempted by countless desires, I would have to let her leave the house without my seeing her, then, rising from my bed, making all my preparations in haste, leave a note for her, taking advantage of the fact that as she could not for the time being go to any place the thought of which would upset me, I might be spared, during my travels, from imagining the wicked things that she was perhaps doing—which for that matter seemed to me at the moment to be quite unimportant—and, without seeing her again, leave for Venice. I rang for Françoise to ask her to buy me a guidebook and a timetable,⁶⁴⁸ as I had done as a boy, when I wanted to prepare in advance a journey to Venice, the fulfillment of a desire as violent as the one that I felt at this moment; I forgot that, in the meantime, there was a desire that I had attained, without any satisfaction, the desire for Balbec, and that Venice, being also a visible phenomenon, was probably no more able than Balbec to fulfill an ineffable dream, that of the Gothic age made actual by a springtime sea, and that came from moment to moment to stir my soul with an enchanted, caressing, elusive, mysterious, confused image. Françoise having heard my ring came into the room, rather uneasy as to how I would take what she had to say and what she had done. "I was very worried," she said to me, "that Monsieur is so late in ringing this morning. I didn't know what I ought to do. This morning at eight o'clock Mademoiselle Albertine asked me for her trunks, I dared not refuse her, I was afraid of Monsieur's scolding me if I came and waked him. It was no use my trying to reason with her, telling her to wait an hour because I expected all the time that Monsieur would ring; she wouldn't have it, she left this letter with me for Monsieur, and at nine o'clock off she went." Then—so ignorant may we be of what we have within us, since I was convinced of my own indifference to Albertine—my breath was cut short, I gripped my heart in my hands suddenly moistened by a perspiration that I had not experienced since the revelation that my mistress had made to me on the little train with regard to Mlle Vinteuil's friend,⁶⁴⁹ without my being able to say anything other than: "Ah! very good, Françoise, you were quite right not to wake me, leave me now for a little, I will ring for you presently."

1. We have seen that Proust often begins a section of a volume or a new volume with a change in the weather or the season. The French use the same word, *temps*, for weather and for time.

- [2.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 565.
- [3.](#) Borodino was Saint-Loup's commanding officer at Doncières during the Narrator's visit. See *The Guermantes Way*, 131.
- [4.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 41.
- [5.](#) The Ballets Russes first came to Paris on May 18, 1909, at the Théâtre du Châtelet and caused a sensation. On June 4, 1910, Proust attended the première of *Scheherazade*.
- [6.](#) In the original, *siffler*, which means to whistle. Scott Moncrieff chose "humming" perhaps because the action seems more feminine.
- [7.](#) "For melancholy is but folly/And he who heeds it is a fool." This is a refrain from *Le Biniou*, a popular song with lyrics by Hippolyte Guérin and music by Émile Durand (1830–1903).
- [8.](#) Odette also had bad taste in music. See *Swann's Way*, 270.
- [9.](#) "A song of farewell rises from troubled springs." This is the first line of *Pensée d'automne*, a melody by Jules Massenet (1842–1912).
- [10.](#) This is the device that hung over the bed and was used to ring the bell to summon a servant.
- [11.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 172.
- [12.](#) For the origin of this article on the steeples of Martinville, see *Swann's Way*, 205–8. Despite his ambition to become a writer and his many resolutions to begin work as a writer, this article is the Narrator's only completed work. See also *The Guermantes Way*, 438.
- [13.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 577.
- [14.](#) We remember this is one of the names for the little train at Balbec.
- [15.](#) This is a reference to an 1894 cycling accident that injured Proust's brother Robert. During his convalescence, he was cared for by a young cocotte named Valentine Mestre. See Proust, *Correspondance*, 1: 323 and 14: 150.
- [16.](#) For the grandmother's admiration of George Sand (1804–76) and her gift of the latter's novels to the young Narrator on his birthday, see *Swann's Way*, 44–45.
- [17.](#) For the parallels between Françoise, her countrymen, and Saint-André-des-Champs, see *Swann's Way*, 173; *The Guermantes Way*, 405, 451, and n. 79.
- [18.](#) This is a modified quotation from a letter that Mme de Sévigné wrote to her daughter Mme de Grignan on January 5, 1676.
- [19.](#) This is a reference to Proust's housekeeper, Céleste Albaret. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 269–73.
- [20.](#) "And death is the reward of whoso dares/To venture in his presence unawares. . . ./None is exempt; nor is there any whom/Or rank or sex can save from such a doom;/Even I myself . . . /Like all the rest, I by this law am bound;/And, to address him, I must first be found/By him, or he must call me to his side." These lines, with only a slight modification, are from Jean Racine's play *Esther*, act 1, scene 3. Proust himself adopted this practice of allowing no one in his room until summoned. The only exception was Reynaldo Hahn. See Proust, *Correspondance*, 16: 245.
- [21.](#) The Buttes-Chaumont is a park in northeast Paris in the nineteenth arrondissement. It was created in the 1860s for the benefit of artisans who lived in that quarter of the city. Its name derives from the "buttes" (hills), part of which is still a barren waste (*calvi montes*). *A Proust Dictionary*, by Maxine Arnold Vogely (Troy, N.Y.: Whitson, 1981), 113.
- [22.](#) Saint-Cloud is a commune near Versailles. It has a beautiful park, designed by André Le Nôtre, that contains the ruins of a sixteenth-century château, formerly the residence of kings.
- [23.](#) The Sainte-Chapelle is on the Île de la Cité, next to the Palais de Justice, which was once a royal residence, constructed by King Louis IX, known as Saint Louis. The chapel's magnificent stained-glass windows are flanked by statues of the apostles standing against the pillars on either side.
- [24.](#) Latin meaning relating to or derived by reasoning from self-evident propositions.
- [25.](#) Champs-Élysées in the original, since the name of this famous avenue is derived from Greek mythology, according to which the Elysian Fields are the abode of the blessed in the Underworld.

Elysian means happy, delightful. In Greek poetry, these fields are paradise or happy land. Orpheus was the son of one of the Muses, who gave him the gift of music. He loved Eurydice, who died soon after their marriage. Orpheus journeyed to the Underworld to recover her and was given permission to do so on the condition that he not look at her until they reached the upper world. He could not resist looking back and he lost her again. Orpheus spent the rest of his days wandering about the world singing and playing his lyre.

[26.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 499.

[27.](#) *Hôtel* or *hôtel particulier* indicates a private Paris mansion.

[28.](#) Mariano Fortuny y Madrazo (1871–1949) was a Spanish fashion and tapestry designer who founded a manufacture of Venetian fabrics. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 519, n. 363.

[29.](#) Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) is famous for his vast collection of novels published under the general title *La Comédie humaine*. He is considered one of the founders of realism for his studies of Parisian and provincial life in mid-nineteenth-century France.

[30.](#) In Balzac's novel *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*, the heroine chooses dresses in accordance with the circumstances of her sentimental life. See Charlus's remarks about Balzac's novels and feminine attire in *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 499–500.

[31.](#) *Langage* in the original. The French distinguish between *langue* (language) and *langage*, the style or manner of speaking.

[32.](#) Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949) was a Belgian poet, dramatist, and essayist, whose plays were allegorical and symbolic. Among his plays was *Pelléas et Mélisande*, performed in Paris on May 17, 1893, and later adapted as an opera by Claude Debussy. For Oriane's denigration of his play *The Seven Princesses*, see *The Guermantes Way*, 248–49.

[33.](#) Prosper Mérimée (1803–70), a writer noted for his exoticism in such works as *Carmen*, *Colomba*, and *Tamango*; Charles Baudelaire (1821–67), poet whose major work, *Les Fleurs du mal*, is considered by many to be the best collection of poetry from his era; Stendhal, pseudonym of Henri Beyle (1783–1842), distinguished nineteenth-century novelist, author of *Le Rouge et le noir* and *La Chartreuse de Parme*; Paul-Louis Courier (1772–1825), soldier, Hellenist, and pamphleteer, virtually forgotten today; Victor Hugo (1802–85), literary giant, author of many poems, plays, and novels, who also served as a republican senator; Henri Meilhac (1831–97), author of comedies and opera libretti, including, with Ludovic Halévy, Bizet's *Carmen*; Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98), poet whose symbolic style was at times hermetic and obscure.

[34.](#) Comtesse Renée de Béarn, née Martine de Béhague (1870–1939), voyaged on her yacht in search of artworks. Among the works in her collection were paintings by Fragonard, Guardi, Tiepolo, Titian, and Watteau.

[35.](#) During his summer vacations in Normandy, Proust frequented this farm restaurant (William the Conqueror), located in Dives, near Cabourg, in the département of Calvados. The town of Cabourg and its Grand Hôtel are the primary models for Balbec and its hotel. Although no longer a farm, the property is still open and operates as a restaurant and a “village d’art.” Proust enjoyed stopping by and drinking its apple cider. See Proust, *Correspondance*, 14: 125. Calvados is famous for its apple trees and the brandy (Calvados) made from its apples.

[36.](#) In this 1851 rustic novel, George Sand uses a few of the colorful expressions spoken by Berrichon peasants.

[37.](#) This is the title of the autobiography of Chateaubriand (1768–1848), whose title, literally, “Memoirs from Beyond the Grave,” was chosen because he intended for it to be published posthumously. In the first section, book 5, chapter 4, the author alludes to a number of Brittany legends.

[38.](#) This French family descends from James Fitzjames, (1671–1734), who was the son of the Duke of York and Arabella Churchill. When he became a naturalized French citizen, he bore the title of Maréchal de Berwick.

39. Henri de Bourbon, Comte de Chambord (1820–83), last legitimist pretender to the French throne under the name of Henri V. His claim to the throne was recognized by the Orléans branch. Henri lived and died in exile in Frohsdorf, Austria, near Vienna.

40. “C’est le petit Léon, le beau-frère à Robert.”

41. This is a community in the département of Morbihan in Brittany. The Rohans are an ancient family of Brittany, a family of which the Prince de Léon was also a member. Marguerite de Rohan is buried in the church at Josselin; there is another town in this département that bears the name Rohan.

42. A pardon is a Breton religious festival.

43. Pampille is the pen name of Mme Léon Daudet, who published her recipes in *L’Action française*. These were later collected in a volume *Les Bons Plats de France, Cuisine régionale* (Paris: Librairie Fayard, 1913). This quotation is from the section of the book devoted to Brittany.

44. The Marquis de Lau was, like Charles Haas (and Charles Swann in this novel), a member of the Jockey Club and a close friend of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. The parenthetical remark concerning Mme H recalls the relationship between Chateaubriand and Mme Récamier. *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard [Pléiade edition], 1988), 3: 546, n. 2.

45. Périgord is an ancient county of France brought under the crown in 1607 by King Henri IV (1553–1610).

46. Anjou is a province of ancient France that was brought under the crown by Louis XI in 1486. Poitou, also an ancient province, was annexed by Charles V in 1369.

47. The *Almanach de Gotha* is the genealogical and diplomatic directory, published, in French and German, since 1763 at Gotha, Germany.

48. For the important passage on the duchess’s red shoes, see *The Guermantes Way*, 657.

49. Prior to the death of her husband’s father, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes were known as the Prince and Princesse des Laumes. See *Swann’s Way*, 22.

50. In French *amphigouri* is a rigmarole with an apparent meaning that proves to be meaningless.

51. These are all used in the plural (*coups*): a *coup d’éclat* is a bold exploit or a coup; *coup de tête* is an impulsive or desperate act; *coup de force* is a sudden, violent act.

52. The Jockey Club, founded on November 11, 1833, to encourage the improvement of horse breeding, was one of the most elegant and exclusive clubs and hence normally closed to Jews like Swann. In Proust’s day, it was located at 1 bis, rue Scribe.

53. Dreyfus was pardoned on September 19, 1899, and the guilty verdict was annulled by the Court of Appeals on July 12, 1906. This means that the time of narration is either in the year 1901 or in 1908.

54. The rue de la Chaise is on the Left Bank in the seventh arrondissement.

55. Charles X (1757–1836) was King of France from 1824 to 1830. He had led the *Ultras*, the extreme Royalist party. Once he was king, his antiliberal and pro-Catholic policies resulted in the July Revolution of 1830, which brought to an end the rule of the elder branch of the Bourbons.

56. He is Aeneas’s chosen comrade and confidant in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. A *fidus Achates* is a faithful companion, a friend who stays close by one’s side.

57. As a result of *J’accuse!*, Zola’s editorial in *L’Aurore* on January 13, 1898, he was tried and sentenced to a year in prison. The next day this newspaper published a petition, signed by Proust and many others, calling for a revision of the Dreyfus trial. Proust attended some of the sessions of Zola’s trial and described the proceedings in *Jean Santeuil*, his unfinished and posthumously published novel. Zola spent a year in exile in England.

58. Latin phrase meaning “against the person.” An argument *ad hominem* is an argument directed against a person rather than against the position that person is maintaining.

59. Jupiter Tonans, or the Thundering Jupiter, was the aspect of the sky god venerated in the Temple of Iuppiter Tonans, dedicated in 22 B.C. on the Capitoline Hill.

60. Édouard Drumont, (1844–1917), politician and author of *La France juive* (1886), a pamphlet attacking Jews, and *Les Juifs et l’Affaire Dreyfus* (1899). He founded *La Libre Parole* (1892), which

became a nationalist, anti-Semitic newspaper.

[61.](#) The Callot Sisters, Doucet, and Paquin were Parisian couturiers and were located respectively, around 1900, at 24, rue Taitbout; 21, rue de la Paix; and 3, rue de la Paix. In a discussion about current fashion, Elstir recommends the sisters to Albertine. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 521, n. 366.

[62.](#) Fortuny had obtained from China rotten eggs the whites of which he used to glue on his fabrics impressions of gold and silver derived from bronze and aluminum. *La Prisonnière* suivi de *Albertine disparue*, edited and annotated by Nathalie Mauriac Dyer (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1993), 103, n. 3.

[63.](#) Reynaldo Hahn's sister, Maria, married Raymond de Madrazo (1841–1920), a Catalan painter and Fortuny's uncle. On several occasions, Proust consulted Maria about the designer: "What would be most useful would be a book *about* Fortuny if such a thing exists, or articles *by* him (mind you, the result will be only a line or two here and there, but even to say a single word about a thing, and sometimes not to say anything at all, I need to saturate myself in it indefinitely). Short of that, a precise description of a particular dress, or a particular coat (has he ever done *shoes*?) in a particular Carpaccio." Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 337.

[64.](#) Consuelo Manchester (1853–1909) became Duchess of Manchester on the death of her husband in 1892.

[65.](#) In the original, *tutoyer*. *Tu* is the singular, familiar form of "you" in French and is normally used when speaking directly to someone who is a family member or a close acquaintance. It may also be used in condescension.

[66.](#) The Galeries Lafayette, founded around 1894, located on the Right Bank on the boulevard Haussmann, remains one of Paris's premier department stores.

[67.](#) For the use of the expression *C'en est une* (one of them), see *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 20–23.

[68.](#) Xerxes, (c. 519–465 B.C.), King of Persia, set out with his fleet to avenge the Persian defeat by the Greeks at Marathon. When his fleet was destroyed by a storm in the Hellespont, he became so enraged that he ordered his servants to chastise the sea with three hundred lashes.

[69.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 406.

[70.](#) This is presumably a reference to Prince Joachim-Napoléon (1856–1932), whose grandfather Joseph-Joachim-Napoléon Murat was Maréchal de France and King of Naples from 1808 to 1815.

[71.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 447–48.

[72.](#) He is Bloch's uncle.

[73.](#) Jacques Thibaud (1880–1953) was a distinguished violinist whom Proust admired. In a letter written in 1908 to Madame Straus, Proust used Thibaud as an example to illustrate the importance of originality: "Every writer is obliged to create his own language, as every violinist is obliged to create his own 'tone.' And between the tone of a run-of-the-mill violinist and that of Thibaud (playing the same note) there is an infinitesimal difference that represents a whole world! I don't mean to say that I like original writers who write badly. I prefer—and perhaps it's a weakness—those who write well. But they begin to write well only on condition that they're original, that they create their own language." Proust, *Selected Letters* 2: 408–9.

[74.](#) The Midi is the south of France.

[75.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 215.

[76.](#) This is Octave, the Verdurins' nephew, known as "I'm in a pickle." See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 497.

[77.](#) "Tea gowns" is in English in the original. We remember that Odette likes to use English expressions. See *Swann's Way*, 89 and 218, n. 12.

[78.](#) Jacques Doucet (1853–1929) was one of France's leading fashion designers. His maison de couture was located at 21, rue de la Paix.

[79.](#) In Greek mythology, the three Furies pursued evildoers on earth in order to punish them.

[80.](#) Proust uses the medieval Latin word for movement.

[81.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 404.

82. Proust uses an idiomatic expression “poser un ‘lapin,’” literally “to place a ‘rabbit,’” as a lure. The phrase’s actual meaning is to stand someone up. We remember that Swann’s intense infatuation with Odette de Crécy began when he did not find her one evening, as he had expected to, waiting for him at Mme Verdurin’s. See *Swann’s Way*, 259–67.

83. In *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, when the Narrator meets Albertine and Saint-Loup for the first time, each is seen against the background of the sea. These images will remain the Narrator’s primary visions of Albertine and Saint-Loup. For examples of the passages where the motif of Albertine and the sea occurs, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 448, 462, 475, 494, and 527. For the Narrator’s first sighting of Saint-Loup against the background of the sea and as yet unidentified by him, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 335–36. Proust often associates a desired girl or woman with a particular landscape and with a particular artist or writer: Gilberte with the Champs-Élysées and Bergotte; Albertine with the sea and Elstir and later with Vinteuil. Proust explained his reasons for this in a letter to Madame de Madrazo: “At the beginning of my second volume a great artist with a fictitious name who symbolizes the Great Painter in my book as Vinteuil symbolizes the Great Composer (such as Franck), says in front of Albertine (who I don’t yet know will one day be my adored fiancée) that according to what he has heard an artist has discovered the secret of the old Venetian materials etc. This is Fortuny.” Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 337. See note 28. We note in this letter that Proust often speaks of himself as though he were the Narrator. Here we need to make an important distinction: This does not mean that Proust makes the Narrator himself but only that Proust often identifies strongly with his fictional counterpart.

84. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 217.

85. Proust believed that a person consists of multiple selves. This notion is used throughout the novel and is an important aspect of his creation of characters. It makes knowing another person, especially one who is an object of desire, difficult if not impossible.

86. Benozzo Gozzoli (1420–97), Florentine painter, who depicted scenes inspired by the Bible. Eric Karpeles suggests that Proust may have been thinking of *The Procession of the Magi*. See Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to In Search of Lost Time* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 227.

87. This is an allusion to Raphael (1483–1520), the Italian painter, architect, and sculptor. No one has been able to determine the paintings depicting the trees that Proust has in mind. *Saint-Sebastian* and *The Deposition*, also known as *The Entombment*, have been proposed.

88. Radica (and not Rosita) and Doodica were Hindu conjoined twins who in 1893, at the age of five, were sold by their father to London showman Captain Colman. The twins were exhibited across Europe by Colman and by P. T. Barnum in 1901–2. They also made appearances in music halls and at the Paris World’s Fair of 1900. In 1902, in Paris, ill with tuberculosis, the twins were separated by Doctor Eugène-Louis Doyen. The surgery was considered a success, but tuberculosis proved fatal to each twin.

89. In the original, *nom de baptême*.

90. In a letter written in December 1919, to André Chaumeix, a literary critic, Proust, in speaking about the Narrator’s jealousy, parenthetically refers to his fictional counterpart as “the one who says *I* and who is not always me.” Proust, *Correspondance*, 18: 524.

91. *Ex voto* is Latin for a votive offering, one dedicated to the fulfillment of a vow.

92. See *Swann’s Way*, 114.

93. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), painter, inventor, sculptor, and doctor, often drew caricatures of old men and women.

94. The Palais de Justice is the building on the Île de la Cité that houses the law courts of Paris. In the Middle Ages, it was the residence of kings.

95. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 3, where Proust uses Sodom to represent male homosexuality and Gomorrah female homosexuality.

96. The French use the word *staircase* (*escalier*) in such cases to indicate an afterthought. For example, the expression, “avoir l’esprit de l’escalier” (to have staircase wit) means to think, while figuratively going down the stairs, of the witty rejoinder that should have occurred to one at the time.

97. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 105–6.

98. The Vicomte Raymond de Borrelli (1837–1906) was a minor playwright and society poet.

99. The sign in physics that indicates velocity is *V*. Albertine owns mysterious rings that bear spread eagles and the initial *A*, which, when inverted, closely resembles the *V* symbol for velocity. See *The Fugitive*, 502–3.

100. See *The Guermantes Way*, 140–41.

101. François Boucher (1703–70) was a painter and engraver, and also a decorator, especially of boudoirs. In 1765, he became the King’s Painter and director of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture. Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) is chiefly known for his small erotic canvases, such as *L’Escarpolette* (The Swing). Proust is perhaps thinking of such works as *La Lettre d’amour* (The Love Letter), which Fragonard painted for Madame du Barry, or another painting, *La Leçon de musique* (The Music Lesson).

102. The Bon Marché is one of the most important department stores on the Left Bank. Founded in 1839 in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district, it is Paris’s oldest such store. In fact, it is said to be the first ever modern department store. Aux Trois Quartiers, founded early in the nineteenth century, was a store selling textiles and clothing. Toward the end of the century it expanded its offerings to become an important department store on the Right Bank. It was located in the first arrondissement at the corner of the boulevard de la Madeleine and the rue Duphot.

103. A guimpe is a high-necked blouse or undergarment worn showing beneath a low-necked dress.

104. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 470–71.

105. The Palais du Trocadéro, in the sixteenth arrondissement, was built by the architect Gabriel Davioud for the 1878 World’s Fair. The Trocadéro, replaced in 1937 by the Palais de Chaillot, housed an elaborate Salle des Fêtes, where concerts and programs were given, and a museum of sculpture, founded in 1882 by Viollet-le-Duc.

106. *Empfindung* and *Empfindelei* are the German words for “sensibility” and “sentimentality.” Proust used these two words in a 1917 letter to Marie Scheikévitch in which he describes these aspects of his characterizations: “I feel exactly as you do about sentimentality. If I may venture to quote myself, since you have read *Swann* you know (and will meet again in subsequent volumes) a certain Bloch who is as tiresomely equipped with *Empfindelei* as he is devoid of *Empfindung* [*sic*] (I am not absolutely sure of the spelling of these Boche words . . .),” Proust, *Selected Letters* 3: 365. Proust’s use of *Boche* for German, the equivalent of *Kraut*, reminds us that in 1917 the French are still fighting the First World War against Germany.

107. Nero (A.D. 37–68) was the last Roman emperor (54–68) of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. His private life was profligate and dissipated. Eventually declared a public enemy by the Senate, he committed suicide.

108. In Greek mythology, Mentor is a friend of Ulysses and the tutor of his son, Telemachus. His name has become synonymous with a wise guide and counselor.

109. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 219–21.

110. See *Swann’s Way*, 14.

111. This plant belongs to the morning glory family.

112. This marks the third day of *The Captive*.

113. According to Céleste Albaret, her husband, Odilon, Proust’s driver for many years, was asked by Proust to listen carefully to what the street hawkers were chanting: “Meticulousness and subtlety were an essential part of him. He couldn’t be happy until he was sure he had everything down to the last detail. I remember, for example, how he cross-questioned Odilon when he wanted to reproduce street vendors’ cries in his book. . . . And when Odilon came back with what the hawkers really said,

you should have seen M. Proust's smile, his warmth, his gratitude!" Céleste Albaret, *Monsieur Proust*, trans. Barbara Bray, with a foreword by André Aciman (New York: New York Review Books, 2003), 277–78.

114. *Boris Godunov*, an opera by Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky (1839–81), was performed in Paris on May 19, 1908, at the Académie Nationale de Musique. The text is from Pushkin's play of the same name and Nikolay Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*. Proust attended a performance of the opera by a Russian troupe on May 22, 1913, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées.

115. Claude Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* premiered on April 30, 1902, at the Opéra-Comique. The libretto comes from Maurice Maeterlinck's symbolist drama of the same name.

116. Scott Moncrieff chose not to translate the street cries. *Bigorneaux* are edible marine snails. "Periwinkles, two sous."

117. "Snails so fresh and fine."

118. This quotation, "Si je dois être vaincue, est-ce à toi d'être mon vainqueur," is not from a work by Jean-Philippe Rameau but from Philippe Quinault's libretto for *Armide*, music by Lully (1686) and Gluck (1777). The exact text is "Ah! si la liberté me doit être ravie, est-ce à toi d'être mon vainqueur?" (Ah! If my liberty is to be taken from me, is it for thee to be my vanquisher?), act 3, scene 1. *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition), 3: 624, n. 1.

119. "I sell them for six sous a dozen."

120. Pelléas and Golaud are Arkel's grandsons. In adapting the play for the opera, Debussy made very few changes in the text of the play.

121. Proust is quoting phrases from the libretto of *Pelléas et Mélisande* that are not linked in the original. "We know not what is happening here" (On ne sait pas ce qu'il y a ici), act 1, scene 1. "It may seem strange" (Proust omitted the *nous*: cela peut nous paraître étrange: it may seem strange to us), act 1, scene 2. "Maybe nought that happens is in vain." (Il n'y a peut-être pas d'événements inutiles. In the original: Il n'arrive peut-être pas d'événements inutiles), act 1, scene 2. Proust's slight alterations (he often quotes from memory) do not alter Scott Moncrieff's translations.

122. "No cause here for alarm," *Pelléas et Mélisande*, act 5.

123. "'Twas a poor little mysterious creature, like everyone." (C'était un pauvre petit être comme tout le monde.) *Pelléas et Mélisande*, act 5, after the death of Mélisande.

124. "Trim dogs, cats, tails and ears."

125. "Clothes for sale, here's the clothes merchant, clothes for sale."

126. Latin phrase meaning "unto the ages of ages" or "for eternity."

127. Latin phrase meaning "may he rest in peace" from a Catholic prayer for the repose of the souls of the dead.

128. "Tender, green, artichokes, so tender and fine, artichokes."

129. The antiphonary is a book containing the part of the mass that is sung. Pope Gregory I, (c. 540–604; pope 590–604), is mistakenly credited with the chant and rite called "Gregorian" that is used in the celebration of mass and the administration of the sacraments. The Gregorian chant is the traditional plainchant of the Church; its rhythm is based on the accents and divisions of the phrases.

130. *Quadrivium* is Latin for four roads or ways. In the Middle Ages, the four roads to learning were arithmetic, music, geography, and astronomy. *Trivium* is Latin for three roads or ways; the three roads to learning were Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic. Together the *quadrivium*, the upper division and the *trivium*, the lower division, constituted the seven liberal arts.

131. "Knives, scissors, razors."

132. "Have you any saws to set? Here's the saw-setter." A setting puts sawteeth in proper alignment and uniform thickness to facilitate cutting.

133. The tinker imitates the sound he makes as he works, then: "It's me who re-tins, even macadam, it's me who mends bottoms everywhere, I plug all the holes, holes, holes, holes."

134. "Have fun, my ladies, enjoy yourselves."

[135.](#) This reprises the situation of the first day of *The Captive*: the Narrator's anticipation of his article finally appearing in *Le Figaro*. See page 7.

[136.](#) "What insolent mortal comes here to meet his doom?" All the following quotations are from Racine's play *Esther*, act 2, scene 7. Proust probably saw this play in 1905 or when it was reprised in 1912. Sarah Bernhardt produced the play, for which Proust's friend Reynaldo Hahn composed the music for the choruses.

[137.](#) "Was it for you this stern decree was made?" Proust changed *un ordre* (an order or decree) to *cet ordre* (this decree).

[138.](#) "I find in you alone a certain grace/That charms me and of which I never tire."

[139.](#) Scott Moncrieff did not translate the original *haute voltige*, which is equestrian vaulting. The Fédération Équestre Internationale in Lausanne regulates and sponsors vaulting events.

[140.](#) The Narrator will answer this question on page 131 after the passage on sleep, which was later inserted into the manuscript.

[141.](#) Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine (1828–93) was a distinguished philosopher, historian, and critic.

[142.](#) George Eliot is the pseudonym of the English novelist Mary Ann Evans (1819–80). Her novel *The Mill on the Floss* was one of Proust's favorites. "It's odd," Proust wrote to Robert de Billy, "how in every genre, however different, from George Eliot to Hardy, from Stevenson to Emerson, there's no other literature that has a power over me comparable to English and American. Germany, Italy, quite often France, leave me indifferent. But two pages of *The Mill on the Floss* are enough to make me cry." Proust, *Selected Letters* 3: 4.

[143.](#) In Greek mythology, Mnemosyne, the goddess of Memory, slept with Zeus for nine consecutive nights and thus became the mother of the Nine Muses. Proust, in an apparently playful mood, invented the word "Mnemotechnia."

[144.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 398–99.

[145.](#) The story of Esther and Ahasuerus is told in the Old Testament in the Book of Esther and is the subject of the play *Esther* (1689), by Jean Racine. Ahasuerus, King of Persia and Media, chose for his wife Esther, a Jewish maiden who at first hid her Jewish religion from him. She was later able to save her people from his persecution. See Esther 2:17.

[146.](#) "Right off the boat, oysters, fresh from the boat."

[147.](#) Prunier is a restaurant that specializes in fish and seafood. It opened in 1872; in Proust's day it was located on the rue Duphot.

[148.](#) "Shrimp, tasty shrimp, fresh skate, still alive, still alive."

[149.](#) "Whiting ready to fry, ready to fry." This fish is a species of cod.

[150.](#) "Mackerel here, fine, fresh mackerel. Here's the mackerel, my ladies, beautiful mackerel."

[151.](#) "Mussels so fresh and fine, mussels, mussels."

[152.](#) "Mackerel" in French means not only the fish but is slang for pimp.

[153.](#) "Lovely romaine, not for sale, out for a stroll."

[154.](#) "Beautiful asparagus from Argenteuil, beautiful asparagus!"

[155.](#) "Barrels for sale, barrels!"

[156.](#) "Gla-zier, gla-zier, broken panes to replace, here's the gla-zier, gla-zier."

[157.](#) During mass, these words precede the Lord's Prayer. These Latin words mean "Taught by the precepts of salvation and guided by divine teaching, we make bold to say . . ."; Vogely, *A Proust Dictionary*, 558.

[158.](#) In the Middle Ages, plays that dealt with secular topics were performed on the parvis, an enclosed area or courtyard.

[159.](#) The reference is to Pope Gregory I, sometimes called Saint Gregory the Great; see note 129.

[160.](#) "Rags, iron to sell. I buy rags and iron."

[161.](#) "Rabbit skins."

[162.](#) "Lovely Valencia oranges, fresh oranges."

[163.](#) "Here are fine leeks."

[164.](#) “Eight sous for my onions.”

[165.](#) From *De rerum natura* 2: 1–2, by the Roman poet Lucretius (c.99–c. 55 B.C.). *Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis/E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem* (Sweet it is, when on the great sea the winds are buffeting the waters/To gaze from the land on another’s great struggles). The phrase is used to express one’s joy at being exempt from dangers experienced by others. Vogely, *A Proust Dictionary*, 675. This line is quoted more than once in the course of the novel.

[166.](#) “Here are carrots for sale, two sous the bunch!”

[167.](#) “Green and tender beans, I have green beans.”

[168.](#) “Lovely cream cheese, cream, cream, good cheese.”

[169.](#) “I have lovely chasselas!” Fontainebleau, located in the Seine-et-Marne département, southeast of Paris, is famous for this variety of white table grapes.

[170.](#) Rebattet, a fashionable confectioner, founded in 1820, was located at 12, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré in the eighth arrondissement.

[171.](#) This shop, which also sold pastries, was located at 196, boulevard Saint-Germain. In Proust’s day, Poiré-Blanche was also known as *À la Dame blanche*.

[172.](#) The Ritz is a famous luxury hotel located in the place Vendôme. Proust often met friends there or dined alone late in the evening. In his later years, when ill or too tired to go out, he would send his driver, Odilon Albaret, to the Ritz to bring him back ice cream or cold beer.

[173.](#) The Vendôme Column stands in the center of the place Vendôme opposite the Ritz Hotel in the first arrondissement. The column, to celebrate the victory of Austerlitz, was started in 1806 at the direction of Napoléon and completed in 1810. Atop the column, stands a statue of Napoléon, bareheaded, crowned with laurels and holding a sword in his right hand and in his left hand a globe surmounted with a statue of Victory.

[174.](#) Proust’s word is *jouissance*, whose meaning ranges from pleasure or enjoyment to orgasm.

[175.](#) Mont Rose is a mountain range in the Alps between Italy and Switzerland. On its many high peaks there are massive accumulations of snow and glaciers. Vogely, *A Proust Dictionary*, 605.

[176.](#) In 1904, Proust saw bonsai trees at Siegfried Bing’s workshop, L’Art Nouveau, located at 22, rue de Provence. See Proust, *Selected Letters*, 2: 18. Bing (1838–1905) was a collector who admired Japanese and Chinese styles and introduced Art Nouveau in furniture. He was cofounder in 1895 of the review *L’Art nouveau Bing*.

[177.](#) Vichy, located in the Allier département, is known for its thermal waters and the sparkling water known as Vichy Célestins. In *Swann’s Way*, Vichy Célestins was an essential part of Aunt Léonie’s limited diet. See *Swann’s Way*, 59.

[178.](#) Scheherazade is the princess of *The Arabian Nights*. In *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the Narrator is rereading this work, 258.

[179.](#) This hotel-restaurant is located at 26, rue des Réservoirs at Versailles. Proust stayed at the hotel from August until December in 1906 and again in September 1908. In his day it was known for its cuisine.

[180.](#) A fiacre is a small horse-drawn hackney coach.

[181.](#) The place d’Armes is a square in Versailles where the main streets and avenues of the town converge.

[182.](#) This cruciform steering wheel (a wheel encircling a cross) common to automobiles in Proust’s day was first noticed by him when Alfred Agostinelli became his driver at Cabourg in 1907. The shape of the wheel inspired this metaphor also used in *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 469.

[183.](#) The Château de Versailles, or the Palace of Versailles, was the royal residence during the reign of Louis XIV, known as the Sun King.

[184.](#) The Trianon is the name of two châteaux in the park of the Palace of Versailles. The first was built by Louis XIV and is known as the Grand Trianon; the second was built by Louis XV for Madame de Pompadour (1721–64) and is called the Petit Trianon. The latter became a refuge for

Marie-Antoinette when she sought more calm and privacy from the crowded, noisy life at the big palace.

[185.](#) Siena is a medieval town located in Tuscany, Italy.

[186.](#) Granada is a city in southern Spain where the Alhambra palace is located.

[187.](#) This is apparently an allusion to Futurism, the manifesto of which was published in *Le Figaro* on February 20, 1909. The Futurists extolled the beauty of modern inventions such as the bicycle, the automobile, and the airplane.

[188.](#) Giovanni Pierluigi Palestrina (1525–94), Italian composer of a hundred or so motets and madrigals.

[189.](#) “Come now all you mamas and papas/make your little ones happy/I’m the one who makes them, I’m the one who sells them/And I’m the one who blows the money/Tra la la la. Tra la la la laire,/Tra la la la la la la./Come now children!”

[190.](#) “Here comes the repair man. I repair glass, marble, crystal, bone, ivory, and antiques. Here comes the repair man.”

[191.](#) The depiction of the Last Judgment and the weighing of souls was a popular story told in stone on the façades of Gothic cathedrals.

[192.](#) These are long, thin baguettes or loaves of bread.

[193.](#) Proust’s words are “en fuite,” fleeing. We have seen that Proust often depicts desired girls as winged creatures of flight.

[194.](#) Stendhal is the author referred to here. This statement can be found in *De l’amour*, chapter 17. Baudelaire quotes this sentence in the first chapter of *Le Peintre de la vie moderne. À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition), 3: 647, n. 1.

[195.](#) These quotations are all a close paraphrase of two of Mme de Sévigné’s letters to her daughter of June 14, 1671, ending at “entirely black.” And “I think of you every moment . . .” from a letter dated September 29, 1675.

[196.](#) This is from Mme de Sévigné’s letter to her daughter on February 11, 1671.

[197.](#) Mme de Sévigné’s worries about her son’s reckless behavior in this letter of May 27, 1680.

[198.](#) *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* is one of the fairy tales collected by Charles Perrault (1628–1703) for his *Contes de ma mère l’Oye* (Mother Goose Stories).

[199.](#) This is a women’s wool sweater worn when playing golf.

[200.](#) A cap in the style often worn at the time by golfers.

[201.](#) *Les Fourberies de Nérine* is a one-act comedy in verse (1864) by Théodore de Banville (1823–91). It premiered at the Théâtre du Vaudeville on June 15, 1864.

[202.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 524: “. . . whose tastes were not to lead her exactly in the direction of gentlemen.” See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 223.

[203.](#) Proust uses, as does Scott Moncrieff, the verb *pénétrer*, meaning in the first use “to affect profoundly with feeling” and in the second “to see into or through others.”

[204.](#) In Greek mythology, the Danaïds were the fifty daughters of Danaus. They were to marry the fifty sons of his twin brother, Aegyptus. All but one of them killed their husbands on their wedding night. Forty-nine of them were condemned to spend eternity carrying water from the river in leaking urns. They represent the futility of a repetitive task that can never be completed. Zeus punished Ixion, for insulting Hera, by having him bound to a wheel of fire that revolves forever.

[205.](#) The Narrator has already given five francs to the dairymaid.

[206.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 569.

[207.](#) See *Swann’s Way*, 121–22.

[208.](#) It is roughly here that Proust stopped correcting the proofs of *La Prisonnière*. This explains some of the inconsistencies that follow in this and the remaining volumes.

[209.](#) A *midinette* is a young milliner or dressmaker who goes home to lunch at midday (*midi*).

[210.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 114.

[211.](#) See *Swann’s Way*, 197.

[212.](#) In 1900, the Concerts Lamoureux, founded by Charles Lamoureux (1834–99), an avid Wagnerian, took place on Sundays at the Cirque des Champs-Élysées. It was there that the young Proust discovered Richard Wagner’s works, primarily through selections heard at the concerts, selections that often included the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*.

[213.](#) Bayreuth is a town in Bavaria, Germany, and the site of Wagner’s home Wahnfried and his grave. Wagner’s operas are performed at his theater, the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, home of the annual Bayreuth Festival.

[214.](#) Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), was a German philosopher who felt that he must flee beauty’s temptations. See *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, part three.

[215.](#) *Parsifal* (1882) is an opera in three acts by Wagner, who wrote it with the Festspielhaus acoustics in mind.

[216.](#) *Le Postillon de Longjumeau* is a comic opera in three acts by Adolphe Adam that premiered at the Opéra-Comique in 1836. The libretto was written by Adolphe de Leuven and Léon Lévy Brunswick. Frédéric Masson, in an article in *La Revue hebdomadaire*, declared that he preferred *Le Postillon de Longjumeau* to *Die Meistersinger*. *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition), 3: 665 n. 3.

[217.](#) Proust wrote that Wagner had a certain feudal genius because the roles he created for squires contain specific warriorlike themes; and that while Wagner was not the first composer to create such roles, his predecessors had composed for them the same sort of music as they did for other characters. *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition), 3: 665, n. 5.

[218.](#) These songs are from acts 2 and 3 of *Tristan und Isolde*.

[219.](#) In the novels of *La Comédie humaine*, Balzac’s characters reappear in different volumes, an enhancing development, but not one intended from the beginning.

[220.](#) Victor Hugo began writing *La Légende des siècles* in 1853, but did not find his definitive title until 1859, when he wrote the preface.

[221.](#) *La Bible de l’humanité* (1864), by Jules Michelet, is an attempt to summarize history in which each civilization is presented as a lay Bible. There are essays on different religions, but the entire work has been called a poem to the glory of civilization.

[222.](#) Michelet wrote *L’Histoire de France* in six volumes from 1833 to 1844, but the preface dates from 1869. Its resuscitation of France’s past is considered the most famous example of nineteenth-century romantic narrative history.

[223.](#) *L’Histoire de la Révolution française* was written, in seven volumes, from 1847 to 1853. Michelet’s purpose was to revive the original Revolutionary faith.

[224.](#) Proust took this phrase, “Le diraije,” from the preface of *L’Histoire de France*.

[225.](#) This is the name given to the cycle of four operatic works by Wagner that compose *Der Ring des Nibelungen*: *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*.

[226.](#) Raphael’s young, fresh, chaste Madonnas are noteworthy in his biblical scenes.

[227.](#) Yseult is the French spelling of Isolde. This orchestral movement is in *Tristan und Isolde*, act 3, scene 2. Isolde is the heroine of medieval legend who was bound to an eternal and irresistible love for Tristan, because they had shared a magic love potion that her mother had prepared for her to drink with her future husband, King Mark. In Wagner’s opera Isolde is sailing to see the dying Tristan in the first scene of act 3.

[228.](#) The shepherd’s pipe is heard in act 3, scene 1 of *Tristan und Isolde*. It awakens Tristan from his lifeless sleep.

[229.](#) Throughout the novel, Proust equates joy with creative success. See, for example, the passage on the steeples of Martinville in *Swann’s Way*, 205–8.

[230.](#) This question or doubt will be resolved in *Time Regained*.

[231.](#) The hammer blows of Siegfried, the hero of the tetralogy, ring out in act 1 of *Siegfried*.

[232.](#) Lohengrin’s swan never takes flight; the knight Lohengrin appears in a boat drawn by a swan in act 1.

[233](#). For a similar analogy where Bergotte's metaphorical automobile becomes an airplane, due to his talent as a writer, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 141.

[234](#). In Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, Mme Arnoux, the married woman with whom Frédéric Moreau has always been in love, pays him a visit. She recognizes on his wall the portrait of la Maréchale, his mistress. She remarks, "I believe I know that woman." He replies, "Impossible! It's an old Italian painting."

[235](#). *Grue* is the word both for "crane" and for "woman of easy virtue." *Faire le pied de grue* is to stand on one leg, while waiting a long time, a pose similar to that of a streetwalker seeking a customer.

[236](#). Henri Rochat, who was Proust's live-in secretary for a period beginning in 1918, broke off his engagement to the daughter of a concierge. This incident may have partly inspired Morel's sinister plot and despicable behavior. For Rochat's contribution to the character of Morel, see William C. Carter, *Proust in Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 179–80.

[237](#). Le Mans is a town in the département of Sarthe.

[238](#). Venus is the Roman goddess of love and beauty.

[239](#). Ceres is the Roman goddess of harvest, agriculture, and civilization.

[240](#). The cathedral of Chartres in the Eure-et-Loir département dates from 1194. Its stained-glass windows are considered by many to be the most beautiful of all the French cathedrals.

[241](#). The Charterhouse of Pavia in Italy is a monastery that was built in the fifteenth century in the Northern Italian Renaissance style. The church is surrounded by mosque features and slender towers. Its architecture resembles to some degree that of the Trocadéro as well as the fortification in a painting by Mantegna.

[242](#). Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506) was an Italian painter who was born in Padua. Saint Sebastian was a captain in the Praetorian guard who helped the Christians, an act for which he was killed by a squadron of archers. This painting can be seen in the Louvre Museum.

[243](#). Passy is a neighborhood on the Right Bank through which one passes on the way to the Bois de Boulogne.

[244](#). The Cirque des Champs-Élysées was built in 1841. It contained an auditorium used for shows and concerts. The building was demolished in 1902.

[245](#). A brown study is a state of serious absorption or distraction.

[246](#). Ski is the nickname of Viradobetski, a Polish sculptor and one of the faithful of Mme Verdurin's little clan. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 292, 298–99.

[247](#). Prince of Wales is the title given since the thirteenth century to the eldest son of the English monarch.

[248](#). A *peri* in Persian mythology is a supernatural being, exquisite and winged, descended from fallen angels and excluded from paradise until a penance is accomplished. The word has become synonymous with a beautiful and graceful girl.

[249](#). See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 400.

[250](#). The Arc de Triomphe is a great arch begun by Napoléon I in 1806 to celebrate the victories of the Empire. It stands at the western end of the Champs-Élysées in the center of the place de l'Étoile, now known as the place Charles de Gaulle.

[251](#). This remark was actually made by Mme de La Rocheguyon and quoted by Tallemant des Réaux in his *Historiettes. À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition), 681, n. 2.

[252](#). This is the Hôtel de Liancourt, the residence of Mme de La Rochefoucauld, referred to above.

[253](#). Ferdinand Barbedienne (1810–92) was a bronze worker who reproduced ancient and modern sculptures often in reduced copies for interior design. In 1890, his shop, Bronzes Barbedienne, was located at 30, boulevard Poissonnière.

[254](#). Proust's word is *justement*; Albertine is precisely the person to whom Gisèle needs to speak. Scott Moncrieff used *must*.

[255.](#) The rue de Berri is in the eighth arrondissement and runs from the Champs-Élysées to the boulevard Haussmann.

[256.](#) The rue Washington, also in the eighth arrondissement, runs from the Champs-Élysées to the avenue de Friedland. It is named for the first president of the United States.

[257.](#) Gulliver is the hero of Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). In the first voyage, Gulliver was shipwrecked on the island of Lilliput, whose inhabitants are about six inches tall.

[258.](#) Janus is a Roman god, the "god of good beginnings." The chief temple dedicated to him in Rome runs east and west, where the day begins and ends. It has two doors between which stood a statue of Janus with two faces, one young, one old.

[259.](#) This observation is part of Proust's preparation of his characters. We meet Vinteuil and Elstir as their public social selves: Vinteuil, the modest, prudish piano teacher in Combray; Elstir as the outrageous painter Tiche or Biche in the Verdurin salon in *Swann's Way*. Only later do we learn that each man is capable of producing masterpieces. Bergotte, who has tremendous prestige in the Narrator's eyes, is known to him at first only through his books. When the Narrator meets the man Bergotte, the former is disappointed in the writer's social self. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 133–41.

[260.](#) This quotation is not found in Anaxagoras's works but in Seneca's *Dialogues*, book 11, chapter 11. Seneca (500–428 B.C.) was a Greek philosopher of the Ionian school. ". . . why is it surprising that a man should die when his whole life is nothing but a journey towards death?" Vogely, *A Proust Dictionary*, 23.

[261.](#) The Apostles on the Day of Pentecost: "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Acts 2:4.

[262.](#) Johannes Vermeer (1632–75), Dutch painter, famous for his interior scenes. *A View of Delft* is Vermeer's only known landscape.

[263.](#) This episode is based in part on Proust's own experience when he ventured out in the daytime, a rare event for him, to see the painting when it was on loan for an exhibition at the Jeu de Paume in May 1921. See William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 752–54. At the time of the exhibition, Proust wrote to a friend about the first time he saw the painting in 1902: "When I saw *A View of Delft* at the Museum in The Hague, I knew that I had seen the most beautiful picture in the world." Proust, *Selected Letters*, 4: 216.

[264.](#) Proust uses the theme of dryness to indicate vanity and sterility, the latter especially in reference to works of art or literature. In French, the term for wasteland is *terre vaine*. We remember the grandmother's strange analogy applied to the steeple of Saint-Hilaire in Combray: "If it [the steeple] could play the piano, I'm sure it wouldn't sound dry." *Swann's Way*, 73.

[265.](#) The question was also asked of the past ("Dead forever?") in the madeleine scene. See *Swann's Way*, 50–54. This recurrent question will be answered in *Time Regained*.

[266.](#) A *pissoièr* is an informal name for a public urinal, a number of which could be found on Paris streets until late in the twentieth century.

[267.](#) Claude-Philibert Barthelot, Comte de Rambuteau (1781–1869), politician and administrator, was prefect of the département of the Seine from 1833 to 1848. He undertook a transformation of Paris; planted many trees, built sewers, and in 1833 added public urinals with separate partitions.

[268.](#) Trousers of such a light color would have been unusual for a man to wear during that era and therefore would have been conspicuous.

[269.](#) Neuilly is a suburb of Paris, north of the Bois de Boulogne on the city's western edge.

[270.](#) The rue de Bourgogne is in the seventh arrondissement and runs from the boulevard Saint-Germain to the rue de Varenne.

[271.](#) Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac contributed a number of family traits and titles of nobility to Proust's fictional Guermantes family.

[272.](#) *Le Pêcheur d'Islande* (1886) is a novel by Pierre Loti (1850–1923) that relates the lives of cod fishermen off the coast of Iceland.

[273.](#) *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1872) is a novel by Alphonse Daudet. The main character is an exuberant, boastful Frenchman of the Midi.

[274.](#) The rue Bonaparte is on the Left Bank in the sixth arrondissement. It runs from the quai Malaquais to the rue de Vaugirard.

[275.](#) Brichot is alluding to gathering places of the little clan: the quai Conti is near the Paris hôtel where the Verdurins lived until about 1913. The Petit Dunkerque, a novelty shop that was fashionable during the 1780s, was located at 3, quai Conti, between the Pont des Arts and the Pont Neuf.

[276.](#) This last sentence was in the edition that Scott Moncrieff translated but has since been eliminated in most of the subsequent French editions. Correctly worded, *grande mortalis aevi spatium* is a quotation from Tacitus's *Agricola*, chapter 3, and means "a great part in the life of a man."

[277.](#) *Le Gaulois* was founded in 1867 and became the leading Monarchist daily during the Third Republic. It was the most important newspaper for social events.

[278.](#) The Cercle de l'Union was an exclusive Parisian club located at 11, boulevard de la Madeleine in the eighth arrondissement.

[279.](#) The Cercle Agricole was a Parisian club situated at 284, boulevard Saint-Germain at the turn of the century.

[280.](#) The Cercle de la rue Royale, after the Jockey Club the most exclusive club in Paris, located at 4, rue Royale in one of the elegant corner buildings with façades designed by Gabriel; the building also faces the place de la Concorde. See *In the Shadow of Young Girl's in Flower*, 68, n. 147.

[281.](#) Cartier is the name of a famous jeweler, founded in 1900 and located at 13, rue de la Paix in the first arrondissement.

[282.](#) Charles Haas, one of the models for Swann, was admitted to the Cercle de la rue Royale. James Tissot's painting *Le Cercle de la rue Royale* (1868) shows Charles Haas and other members on the balcony overlooking the place de la Concorde.

[283.](#) Général Gaston Auguste, Marquis de Galliffet (1830–1909), was minister of war in the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet from 1899 to 1900, and thus at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. Before that he was known especially for the savagery with which he repressed the Commune de Paris in 1871.

[284.](#) Prince Edmond de Polignac (1834–1901) married Winnaretta Singer (1865–1943), the American heiress to the Singer sewing machine fortune. He and the princess were music lovers and the principal subject of Proust's article in *Le Figaro*, September 6, 1903, signed Horatio and entitled "Le Salon de la Princesse Edmond de Polignac."

[285.](#) Gaston de Saint-Maurice was a friend of Charles Haas.

[286.](#) Antoine de Noailles, Duc de Mouchy (1841–1909) was active in politics.

[287.](#) Boucher (see note 101) designed tapestries for Beauvais, an important center of tapestry and upholstery manufacture.

[288.](#) This fire will be alluded to in the Goncourt pastiche in *Time Regained*.

[289.](#) The rue Montalivet is in the eighth arrondissement.

[290.](#) Proteus, in Greek mythology, is an old man of the sea to whom Poseidon (Neptune) gave the gift of prophecy and the power to change his form at will.

[291.](#) Otto Wegener (1849–1922) was a Swedish photographer who moved to Paris in 1867. He opened a fashionable studio at a fashionable address, 3, place de la Madeleine. Using simply the name Otto, he successfully competed with others such as Félix Nadar for aristocratic customers. He made photographs and *cartes de visite* of Proust and many other prominent people. *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photographers*, ed. John Hannavy (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 1484.

[292.](#) Guillaume Lenthéric was an important firm that produced perfumes and cosmetics. It was located at 245, rue Saint-Honoré.

[293.](#) In this context, "apache" means a member of a gang of criminals or hooligans, especially in Paris.

[294.](#) Henri Désiré Landru (1869–1922) was arrested in April 1919 for the murder of ten women and a young boy. He invited his female victims, to whom he proposed marriage, to his villa where he strangled them and buried their corpses. His trial was held in 1921. Public opinion about his guilt was divided.

[295.](#) Plato (429–347 B.C.), Greek philosopher who was a disciple of Socrates.

[296.](#) Virgil (c. 70–19 B.C.), Latin poet whom Dante imagines as his guide to Hell in *The Divine Comedy*.

[297.](#) Socrates (c. 470–399 B.C.), Greek philosopher, who displays his wit and wisdom in Plato's *The Symposium*.

[298.](#) Praxiteles was a Greek sculptor who lived in the fourth century B.C.

[299.](#) Jean de La Bruyère (1645–96) was a moralist who translated *Les Caractères de Théophraste* from the Greek and then wrote his own work, *Les Caractères*. This approximate quotation is from section 21, *Dela mode* (On Fashion).

[300.](#) Theocritus (c. 315–c. 250 B.C.), was a Greek poet and is considered the creator of bucolic poetry. His eighth *Idyll* suggests that the shepherd Menalkas is attracted to the handsome Daphnis. The sighs for a young boy are more definitely expressed in *Idylls* twenty-nine and thirty, which describe the longings of Theocritus himself. See Virgil *Eclogue* 2, where Corydon is enamored with the young shepherd, Alexis.

[301.](#) Theocritus's third *Idyll* is the song of the shepherd who sighs for the nymph Amaryllis.

[302.](#) Proust greatly admired the late quartets of Beethoven (1770–1827). See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 115.

303. Paolo Veronese (1528–88) was a chief painter of the Venetian school whose works are notable for their large scale, such as *The Marriage at Cana* and *Adoration of the Magi*.

304. This is a reference to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Inferno*, canto 14.

305. Doménikos Theotokópoulos (1541–1614), known as El Greco, was a painter of Greek origin who settled in Toledo, Spain. He painted a portrait of Cardinal Don Fernando Nino de Guevara, archbishop of Toledo, who was appointed Grand Inquisitor in 1599.

306. In the original, Proust plays on the similar sounds in *toilette* (women's attire) and *toile*, a canvas or a painting. He put *toile* in quotation marks.

307. In the original, pointedly, in the feminine form, *la Couturière*.

308. A kokoshnik is the traditional headdress of Russian women, in the form of a diadem.

309. Charlie is Charles Morel's nickname.

310. Mont Blanc is the highest peak in the Alps, rising 15,774 feet above the valley of Chamonix in the Haute-Savoie of Switzerland.

311. Jean Sully Mounet, known as Mounet-Sully (1841–1916), played tragic roles such as those of Oedipus and Hamlet.

312. Before the French Revolution, the Catholic Church had been the official state religion of France since the conversion to Christianity of Clovis I (c. 466–511), leading to France being called "the eldest daughter of the Church."

313. The devotion to the Sacred Heart (also known as the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, *Cor Sacratissimum Iesu* in Latin) is one of the most widely practiced and well-known Catholic devotions. The heart of the resurrected body represents the love of Jesus. "His heart, pierced on the Cross," as described in the New Testament, reveals God's boundless and passionate love for mankind.

314. This is a reference to Philippe, Duc d'Orléans (1640–1701), known as Monsieur, the second son of Louis XIII and Anne d'Autriche, and brother of Louis XIV. The remark is found in Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*; see *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition), 3: 720, n. 2.

315. Albertine uses the same deception, 362–63.

316. This anticipates the scene in the homosexual brothel in *Time Regained*.

317. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), German musical giant whose name is most closely associated with the fugue. George Frideric Handel (1685–1759), British (German-born) composer of majestic oratorios, operas, concertos, and other musical genres.

318. This is the only mention in *The Search* of Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924), an Italian composer, whose popular operas, contemporary to Proust, include *La Bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madama Butterfly* (1904). Proust apparently believed that Puccini's music is a kind of standard Italian music and less rigorous than the compositions of Bach and Handel.

319. In the original, "cartons," in the plural. The expression *tirer un carton* is slang meaning to prostitute oneself and thus for sexual relations.

320. *Écarté* is a two-player card game similar to whist.

321. Agnolo di Cosimo, called Il Bronzino (1502–72) was a Florentine painter who produced many portraits of handsome young men. Proust is probably thinking of Bronzino's *Portrait of a Young Man*, which hung in the Grande Galerie of the Louvre in Proust's day.

322. This is a synonym for dispossessed.

323. Hector Berlioz (1803–69) was a composer and musical critic whose essays appeared in various journals. He wrote *Soirées d'orchestre* (1852), *Voyage musical en Allemagne et en Italie* (1884), and *Mémoires*, published posthumously.

324. These comments do not take into account Bergotte's death, a passage that was inserted late in this volume. See pages 193–99.

325. Dominique Ingres (1780–1867) was a staunch classicist painter and bitter rival of Delacroix, head of the new Romantic movement. Ingres yearned to be a violin player, a talent at which he apparently did not excel. This gave rise to the French expression "violon d'Ingres" (Ingres's violin),

used to indicate an unrealizable ambition or a hobby. Thus, violinist Morel's writings are like Ingres's attempts to play the violin.

326. The Conservatoire National de Musique et de Déclamation, founded in 1784 to train singers and actors for the national stage, was located at 15, rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière. In 1911, it moved to the rue de Madrid.

327. Latin for right and wrong.

328. This is a reference to Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, known as Il Sodoma (c. 1477–1549), an Italian painter whose nickname is a justification of the esthetic theses, à la Oscar Wilde, of Charlus. À la recherche du temps perdu (Pléiade edition) 727, n. 2. Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), in his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, evokes the licentious lifestyle of Bazzi, referring to him as “brutal” and “eccentric.” Bazzi took much pleasure in the company of young men, which earned him the nickname, in which he took pride.

329. This will be seen in *Time Regained*.

330. In the original, *pour que tourne la rose des vents*, to turn the compass rose, which is a circle making degrees or quarters and printed on a chart or map to show direction.

331. This is, in fact, the illness that proved fatal to Proust on November 18, 1922.

332. Abbot Charles Batteux (1713–80) was a philosopher who wrote about literary esthetics. His best-known work is *Cours de belles-lettres* (A Course of the Belles Lettres, or the Principle of Literature).

333. The Duc de Guermantes used a similar strategy on learning that his cousin Amanien d'Osmond was near death. See *The Guermantes Way*, 637–38.

334. The Montesquiou-Fezensac family goes back, through the Fezensac branch, to the eleventh century. However, the family did not acquire the title of duke until it was bestowed by Louis XVIII in 1821.

335. The principedom is fictitious. Condom is an arrondissement created in 1800 in the Occitanie region of southwestern France near Spain. Condom Cathedral is a historic monument.

336. Charles d'Alberti (1578–1621) was a statesman and favorite of Louis XIII, who made him constable and Duc de Luynes.

337. She is the concierge in *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–43) by Eugène Sue.

338. These are characters from *Scènes populaires* (1835), the *Nouvelles scènes populaires* (1862), and the *Mémoires de Joseph Prudhomme* (1857), by Henri Monnier.

339. Suzanne Reichenberg (1853–1924) was an actress famous for her role as ingénue at the Comédie-Française. She made her début in 1868 in the role of Agnès in Molière's *L'École des femmes*.

340. In contrast to Suzanne Reichenberg, Sarah Bernhardt played more dramatic, often tragic, roles.

341. The twelve books of *Fables* of Jean de la Fontaine (1621–95) were part of the curriculum in secondary schools, whose students were required to memorize the most famous of them, which is the only reason, the Narrator implies, that the marquis knows these.

342. Joseph Reinach (1856–1921), politician and journalist, was one of the earliest defenders of Dreyfus. He is the author of a seven-volume *Histoire de l'Affaire Dreyfus*.

343. Paul Hervieu (1857–1915), playwright and novelist, was an anti-Dreyfusard, although he favored a new trial.

344. Anatole France (1844–1924), one of the most distinguished writers of his era, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1921. Young Proust greatly admired France, who in 1896 wrote the preface for Proust's first book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*. Proust secured France's signature on a petition for a new trial for Dreyfus. France was also one of the models for the writer Bergotte.

345. These two caterers were located at 25, boulevard des Italiens and 28, rue Vivienne in the second arrondissement.

[346.](#) The model for Princess Yourbeletief was Mme Alfred Edwards, née Misia Godebska. She was a French patron of the Ballets Russes.

[347.](#) In the original, the Fée Carabosse, an evil fury who grants only undesirable gifts.

[348.](#) Gabrielle-Alexandrine Meley married Émile Zola on May 31, 1870.

[349.](#) The Cour d'Assises, held in the Palais de Justice, is the highest criminal court in Paris. The trial of Zola, indicted for supporting Dreyfus and having accused the military of having framed him, took place here February 7–23 and March 31–April 2, 1898.

[350.](#) Colonel Georges Picquart (1854–1914) testified on behalf of Dreyfus.

[351.](#) Fernand Labori (1860–1917) was Dreyfus's lawyer and also Émile Zola's during the latter's trial.

[352.](#) Général Émile Zurlinden (1837–1929) was minister of war in 1898; he doubted Dreyfus's innocence.

[353.](#) Émile Loubet (1838–1929), was president of France (1899–1906) at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. He signed Dreyfus's pardon.

[354.](#) Colonel Albert Jouaust was president of the court martial in Rennes at the time of Dreyfus's second trial in 1899. He was convinced of Dreyfus's innocence.

[355.](#) *Scheherazade* is a ballet based on Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite (1888) that bears the same name (see note 178). It was performed by the Ballets Russes at the Opéra in 1910 with Proust in attendance, apparently at the June 4 performance.

[356.](#) *Prince Igor*, an opera by the Russian composer Alexander Borodin was adapted for a ballet by the Ballets Russes in 1909.

[357.](#) Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) was a Russian composer who created a number of ballets for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, the most famous of which, *Le Sacre du printemps*, caused a riot at its 1913 premiere in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. His other works for the Ballets Russes were *Firebird* (1910) and *Petrouchka* (1911).

[358.](#) Richard Strauss (1864–1949) was a German conductor and composer whose operas *Salomé* (1907) and *La Légende de Joseph* (1914) were performed in Paris. Strauss's most famous work is the opera *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911).

[359.](#) The philosopher Claude-Adrien Helvétius (1715–71) and his wife welcomed intellectuals and philosophers to their salon at their hôtel in the rue Saint-Antoine. Among those who attended were d'Alembert, d'Holbach, Duclos, Turgot, and Condorcet.

[360.](#) *Les Sylphides* (1909) is a one-act ballet choreographed by Michel Fokine to music of Chopin, orchestrated into a medley of nocturnes, waltzes, and mazurkas. The ballet was performed at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 1909.

[361.](#) Jean Jaurès (1859–1914) was a statesman and prominent socialist leader before World War 1. He led a vigorous campaign in the Chambre des Députés for a revision of the verdict in the Dreyfus case. He was assassinated in 1914.

[362.](#) This theater was founded in 1888 by the actor André Antoine and became in 1896 the Théâtre-Antoine. Its goal was to stage realistic settings of naturalistic dramas, such as *La Fille d'Élisa* by the Goncourt Brothers. It also featured authors such as Courteline, Turgenev, Ibsen, and Strindberg.

[363.](#) Rhino-gomenol is a decongestant and antiseptic ointment that Proust himself used.

[364.](#) Cottard's death, like Bergotte's, was an addition that Proust made to the third typescript. Proust's own death prevented these episodes from being integrated into the story. Cottard will reappear quite alive later on in this volume and his death will be reported again during the war in *Time Regained*.

[365.](#) In French, the axiom rhymes: *Mieux vaut prévenir que guérir*. Better to prevent than to cure.

[366.](#) *Les Nuits* are four lyrical dialogues between Alfred de Musset (1810–57) and his muse: "La Nuit de mai" (1835); "La Nuit de décembre" (1835); "La Nuit d'août" (1836); "La Nuit d'octobre" (1837).

367. In such conversations, the inverts use the feminine noun *personne*, rather than *homme* (man) because *personne* can indicate a person of either sex. In French, the gender agreement is usually determined by the gender of the noun and not that of the person referred to. Thus, the pronoun used for *personne* is *elle*, she, which is why Scott Moncrieff chose that word for the translation.

368. Aristide Bruant (1851–1925) was a cabaret singer and nightclub owner who became a star performer at the Chat Noir in Montmartre. In 1885, he opened his own club, the Mirliton. He often insulted and ridiculed the club's upper-crust guests who were out "slumming" in Montmartre.

369. This particular insult might be translated thus: "Ah, get a load of that mug! Have you ever seen such a noodle!"

370. These are fictional characters, although Theodosius is based on Tsar Nicolas II, who visited France in 1896 and again in 1901.

371. The Queen of Naples, née Marie de Wittelsbach (1841–1925), married in 1859 Francis II, King of the Two Sicilies, a realm that included Naples. She endured with him the siege of Gaeta, which lasted from November 1860 until February 1861, against the troops of Victor Emmanuel. After the surrender, the queen and her husband were exiled to Rome and then to Paris.

372. The Queen of Naples had two sisters: Elisabeth, Empress of Austria, and Sophie, Duchesse d'Alençon. One of her brothers, Charles Theodore Wittelsbach, had a daughter, Elisabeth, who married Prince Albert of Belgium in 1900.

373. Prince Albert of Belgium (1875–1934) was King of Belgium from 1909 until his death.

374. Proust apparently knew this story of the queen's defensive action from having read Pierre de la Gorce's *Histoire du Second Empire* (E. Plon, Nourrit et Company, 1894–1905, seven volumes).

375. *Vade mecum*, a Latin phrase meaning "go with me," is used to indicate a handbook or guidebook or some other instructive item that one might carry.

376. In Norse mythology, the Norns are the Goddesses of Destiny. They correspond to the Moirai of Greek mythology (in Latin, the Parcae). In the prologue of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, the three sisters of fate, the Norns, meet and their words predict the end of the gods.

377. The "éternel matin" is a line from Victor Hugo's poem, "Le Temple," from his collection *La Légende des siècles*, epic poems published in three series (1859, 1877, and 1883). These poems depict humanity's historical and spiritual development from biblical times through the post-Revolutionary period.

378. In mythology, a Sibyl was a woman who uttered the oracles and prophecies of a god.

379. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 537, 540–44, 557; *The Guermantes Way*, 387.

380. "The poet is speaking" (*Der Dichter spricht*) and "the child is asleep" (*Kind im Einschlummern*) are the titles of two piano pieces by Robert Schumann (1810–56) in his Opus 15, *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from childhood), a set of thirteen pieces written in 1838. The two referred to by Proust are numbers 13 and 12. Schumann was a German composer who wrote many lieder.

381. For the Narrator, the creative act always produces joy. This was first observed in the madeleine episode, where an involuntary memory is seen as annunciatory to the act of creation. Another example is the extreme joy the Narrator experienced after having written the essay about the steeples of Martinville.

382. These are the frescoes by Michelangelo that depict the creation of the world: God dividing the light from the darkness, dividing the earth from the waters, creating man and woman.

383. These meditations on life and art lead Proust to the eternal question of immortality such as the "Dead forever?" question the Narrator poses in the madeleine scene (*Swann's Way*, 50) and from time to time throughout the novel. Similar speculations are found in the passage describing the death of Bergotte.

384. A dryad is a tree nymph.

385. In the original, *Inconnue*, a noun with feminine ending that, in Proust's imagination, indicates a mysterious woman seen and desired but impossible to obtain.

386. Proust saw such angels by the Italian painter Giovanni Bellini (c. 1439–1516) in the San Giobbe Altarpiece, now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice. In the painting, three musician angels sit at the feet of the Virgin.

387. In the Italian painter Andrea Mantegna's *Assumption of the Virgin*, in the Church of the Eremitani in Padua, there is an angel sounding a horn. Proust saw the painting when he visited Padua in 1900. See *Swann's Way*, 147, 370.

388. See the passage on the steeples of Martinville, *Swann's Way*, 207–8. For the trees at Hudimesnil, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 322–25.

389. For centuries the Catholic Church has set aside the entire month of May to honor Mary, who, according to that faith, is the mother of God.

390. For this scene between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, see *Swann's Way*, 182–89.

391. This can be read as a discreet endorsement of same-sex marriage or at least an anticipation of it.

392. “Romance de l'Étoile” and “Prière d'Élisabeth” are arias from Act 3 of Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*. In Act 3, Wolfram sings to the evening star: “O du, mein holder Abendstern” (O thou, my gracious evening star). Elisabeth prays to the Virgin: “Allmächt'ge Jungfrau, hör mein Flehen!” (Almighty Virgin, hear my prayer!).

393. *Das Rheingold* (1854), *Tristan und Isolde* (1859), and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1867) are operas by Wagner.

394. “Le Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean” is poem number 12 in the collection *Ballades* by Victor Hugo. A pas d'armes is a tournament.

395. “La Fiancée du Timbalier” is poem number 6 in Hugo's *Ballades*. A timbalier is a cavalier who plays the kettledrum.

396. “Sara la baigneuse” is poem number 19 in Hugo's collection *Les Orientales*.

397. *Les Contemplations* (1856) is a collection of poems by Hugo.

398. A Panamist was a partisan in a political scandal during the Third Republic that arose from the collusion of industrialists and government officials concerning a proposed canal in Panama. The involvement of several prominent Jews contributed to anti-Semitism.

399. Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), Norwegian poet and playwright whose plays offer realistic dramas that focus on philosophical and social issues. His work was introduced in France on May 30, 1890, when André Antoine produced *Ghosts* at the Théâtre-Libre.

400. Ernest Renan (1823–92) was a historian and scholar who held the chair of professor of Hebrew Studies at the Collège de France. His lectures were suspended when they were considered too unorthodox and his chair suspended after the publication in 1863 of his most controversial work, *La Vie de Jésus* (The Life of Jesus).

401. Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–81) was a Russian novelist whose books are known for their powerful explorations of the lives of ordinary and extraordinary people as they search for meaning and truth. Later the Narrator will discuss his novels with Albertine.

402. Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863–1938), Italian poet, novelist, and playwright, spent several years in France and became a controversial figure in Parisian society in the early 1900s. Later, as a political leader in Italy, he exiled in France 1910–15 to escape his debts. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 75.

403. Count Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) wrote letters to Tsar Nicholas II advocating universal suffrage and other reforms. Two of his novels, *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection*, were adapted for the French stage at the Odéon in 1902.

404. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 285–86.

405. It was actually the Narrator's Uncle Adolphe who introduced his nephew to the lady in pink. See *Swann's Way*, 86.

406. Saniette will reappear later on.

407. *Ouvreuse* in the original, indicating a woman. Ushers in French theaters were usually women.

408. On the death in 1862 of Raoul de Montmorency (duke 1846–62) the line of the third creation of the title, Duc de Montmorency, became extinct. In 1864, Napoléon III bestowed the title on the last duke's nephew, Adalbert Talleyrand-Périgord.

409. This is a possible reference to the Bohemian (Czech) String Quartet that performed in Paris on November 15, 1896, at the Lamoureux Concerts. Vogely, *A Proust Dictionary*, 574.

410. Comte Georges de Buffon (1707–88) was a naturalist who wrote a vast *Histoire naturelle* (1749–89) in thirty-six volumes. He noted sarcastically that “a camel has as much courage as it does docility.” In French, in informal speech, *camel* is used to refer to an unpleasant character.

411. Charlus is again pretending to take the expression literally; in this case, a “dancing tea.”

412. Proust uses a rare word here: *épieur*, an adjective whose root is the same as that of the verb *épier*: to spy.

413. Charlus echoes a common biblical trope, but the immediate source is apparently a commentary on Psalm 58 by the Welsh nonconformist minister Matthew Henry (1662–1714) in his six-volume *Exposition of the Old and New Testament* (1708–10), p. 368: “None is so deaf as those that will not hear.”

414. In the original, “he never has four cats without . . .” The expression means that when he intends to invite only a few, he ends up with a crowd instead.

415. Comtesse Bertrand de Montesquiou, née Émilie de Pérusse des Cars, was the sister of Hélène (1840–1933), a close friend of the Prince of Wales, future King Edward VII. In society, people referred to Hélène as Mme Henry Standish, a woman known for her beauty and elegance. After meeting her in May 1912, Proust wrote to a friend: “I made the acquaintance . . . of a beauty of the *Septennat*, Mme Standish . . . whom I found (making all necessary allowances for age etc.) splendid in her marinated elegance, her artful simplicity.” The *Septennat* refers to the seven-year presidential term of office and specifically here to Marshal MacMahon's presidency of the Third Republic (1873–79). Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 74.

416. See *The Guermantes Way*, 318–19.

417. This is an allusion to the stormy reception that greeted Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in Paris in May 1895. In a letter to Suzette Lemaire, Proust, who attended a performance of the opera in 1895, speaks of the “stupidity of the audience.” *Correspondance* 1: 384–85. Even the support of the Princess de Metternich, wife of the Austrian ambassador to France, was not sufficient to make the evening a success for the opera.

418. Charlus recognizes only one. However, Joseph-Joachim Murat, one of Napoléon's most celebrated marshals, was King of Naples and the Two Sicilies from 1808 to 1814. Princesse Murat, née Caroline-Berthier de Wagram (1832–84), married his grandson, Joseph-Joachim Napoléon Murat, and claimed the title Queen of Naples.

419. Beckmesser is a character in Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger* who makes a fool of himself by wanting to participate in a singing contest. He stresses technique versus inspiration. In the last act, he gives a ludicrous interpretation of a song composed by the young hero Walther and is laughed off the stage.

420. Charlus is making a word play on *allegro* and *allègre*; the latter means lively.

421. The flower was supposed to ensure that those wearing it would not be forgotten by their lovers.

422. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814) was a naturalist and a writer, author of *Paul et Virginie* (1788), a paean to natural love. His *Études de la nature* (1784) depicted the natural world with accuracy but, instead of relying on scientific knowledge and method, took the sentimental view of the world as created by God for human use.

423. Jupiter, the Greek Zeus in mythology, is the ruler of the gods.

424. In the original, *Décret de Moscou*, a decree signed by Napoléon in Moscow on October 15, 1812, before the retreat from Russia. This document established the regulations of the Comédie-Française, the rights and duties of the members of the company.

[425.](#) Mme Verdurin uses the word *tapette*, from *taper* to strike or hit. The term, as used by Mme Verdurin means to be an annoying chatterbox. *Tapette* is slang, however, for an effeminate or passive homosexual.

[426.](#) In the original, *un amant*, masculine, a male lover.

[427.](#) Count Ladislaus Hoyos-Sprinzenstein (1834–95) was Austrian ambassador to France from 1883 to 1894.

[428.](#) In Miguel de Cervantes's novel *Don Quixote*, Aldonza Lorenzo, a sturdy Spanish peasant girl, is renamed Dulcinea by the delusional knight-errant of the title, who believes that, according to the rules of chivalry, he must swear allegiance to an ideal lady of his dreams.

[429.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 293, 539–40.

[430.](#) Theosophists—especially those in the movement founded in 1875 as the Theosophical Society by Helena Blavatsky (1831–91), a Russian philosopher, and by an American colonel, Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907)—believe that a knowledge of God may be achieved through spiritual ecstasy, direct intuition, or special individual relations. Lionel Hauser, Proust's financial adviser, was a believer in Theosophy.

[431.](#) Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), a German philosopher and metaphysician, was the author of important philosophical essays, including *Critique of Pure Reason* (1771) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). His writings examine the question of freedom and necessity in the moral order.

[432.](#) Pomerania is a historical region on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea in central Europe, split between Poland and Germany. Brichot's objections to this philosophy are a parody of those that one often heard made against Kant's premises by his detractors.

[433.](#) The setting for this work by Plato is a banquet offered by Agathon to his friends. Each guest speaks in turn about beauty and love. In his humorous reference to gigolos, Brichot is referring to those passages about men's love for young men.

[434.](#) Xenophon (430–355 B.C.), a Greek philosopher and historian, was a student of Socrates'.

[435.](#) Joséphin Péladan (1858–1918) was a man of letters and a practitioner of the occult. In 1892, he founded the Salon de la Rose-Croix Catholique, which organized several salons of paintings in the Durand-Ruel Gallery. Péladan wanted to establish in France a mystical sect similar to the one that had its origins in seventeenth-century Germany.

[436.](#) Petronius, the author of *Satyricon*, slit his wrists in A.D. 66 after having been accused of plotting to murder Nero. According to Brichot, Charlus is a summation of esoteric symbolism in the manner of Rosicrucians and satiric chroniclers. *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition), 3: 787, note 3.

[437.](#) This is an error on Proust's part: the valet was Morel's father. See *The Guermantes Way*, 287.

[438.](#) Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. A.D. 56–120) was a Roman historian and politician. This quotation is from chapter 3 of his *Agricola*: "a great part of the life of a man," and refers to the fifteen-year reign of Domitian, a reign during which literary activity was suppressed.

[439.](#) The heroine of *Hernani*, a play by Victor Hugo that premiered in 1830, a date that marked the beginning of the Romantic movement in France. After Doña Sol and Hernani are married and the guests have left the wedding party, the two stand alone on the balcony. In the distance, Don Ruy Gomez de Silva sounds his horn to remind Hernani of his oath to kill himself immediately after the ceremony. Charlus is about to be the victim not of suicide but of one of Mme Verdurin's "executions."

[440.](#) Thomas Couture (1815–79) was a painter whose most famous work, *Les Romains de la décadence*, now hangs in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. The painting depicts the aftermath of an orgy; in the right foreground two figures (Proust's philosophers?) appear to be coolly contemplating the scene.

[441.](#) George Enesco (1881–1955), was a Romanian violinist and composer who performed in Paris at the Concert Colonne in 1898 and 1899. Lucien Capet (1873–1928) was a French violinist and composer who was a professor at the Conservatoire de Paris. He was the leader of the Capet Quartet,

one of the foremost interpreters of Beethoven's music. Proust heard all three violinists play before the outbreak of the war in 1914.

[442.](#) Théodore Rousseau (1812–67) was a landscape artist who often painted scenes of the forest of Fontainebleau. He wrote: “Si l’on peut contester qu’ils pensent (les arbres), à coup sûr ils nous donnent à penser”: One may challenge the notion that trees think, but it is undeniable that they make us think. For a similar belief by Victor Hugo, see *The Guermantes Way*, 605. *La Prisonnière*, ed. Mauriac Dyer, 608, n. 4.

[443.](#) Georges Bizet (1838–75) was a composer best known for the opera *Carmen*. Bizet's widow, Geneviève, upon remarriage Mme Straus, became in Proust's adulthood one of his closest friends and confidantes. Georges and Geneviève's only child, Jacques Bizet, was a classmate of Proust's at the Lycée Condorcet. For more details, see Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*.

[444.](#) The peal of the bells rung to call the Catholic faithful to pray. The prayers of the Angelus were said in the morning, at noon, and in the evening.

[445.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 283.

[446.](#) A florilegium is an anthology. Proust uses the French equivalent: *florilège*.

[447.](#) Auguste Vacquerie (1819–95) and Paul Meurice (1820–1905) were disciples and friends of Victor Hugo. The latter was Hugo's literary executor.

[448.](#) Proust is thinking of his own duel, fought with columnist Jean Lorrain in 1897, after Lorrain strongly hinted in his newspaper column that Proust was homosexual. On other occasions, Proust seriously contemplated challenging an offender, real or presumed, to a duel. See Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, 215, 234–36. Speaking of his early years in a 1920 letter to a friend, Proust wrote, “I was obsessed with duels.” Proust, *Correspondance*, 19: 75.

[449.](#) *Appariteur* in the original; a minor university official, a kind of usher or porter in French universities.

[450.](#) These words, “lift up your hearts,” are from the rite of consecration of bread and wine in the Latin mass.

[451.](#) The House of Condé was that of a great French noble family from the early sixteenth century until Louis-Henri-Joseph, the last descendant, died in 1830.

[452.](#) *Fraise* in the original. Although the word means strawberry, it also is used for the article of clothing known as a ruff, which is a large round collar of pleated muslin or linen worn by men and women of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Scott Moncrief translated this rather literally: “crowned with strawberry leaves.”

[453.](#) This proverb, from Proverbs 16:9, is repeated by Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471) in his *Imitation of Christ*.

[454.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 610–21.

[455.](#) As with Bergotte and Cottard, her death was not integrated into the novel due to Proust's own death before he had time to revise the remainder of the novel. She will reappear in *The Fugitive*.

[456.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 320.

[457.](#) The Monarchie de Juillet was a regime that lasted from 1830 to 1848, when Louis-Philippe ruled France as a constitutional monarch.

[458.](#) Louis-Philippe (1773–1850) was known as the Roi-Citoyen (Citizen King) during the July Monarchy.

[459.](#) This is an allusion to *La Vie de Michel-Ange* (The Life of Michelangelo) by Romain Rolland (1906), in which he evokes the artist's attachment to the poet Vittoria Colonna, an attachment that was already well known by biographers.

[460.](#) Leo X (1475–1521) was pope from 1513 to 1521. He commissioned Michelangelo to create a number of works, including the tombs of the Medicis in Florence.

[461.](#) This is a reference to high society and what was seen as its extreme opposite: the butchers and apaches of La Villette, a working-class section in the nineteenth arrondissement. This rough

neighborhood had cattle auctions and slaughterhouses. Members of these social groups will encounter each other in Jupien's brothel in the last volume of the novel, *Time Regained*.

[462](#). This is an allusion to the Dreyfus Affair, which could not be mentioned in social circles, and even in some families, for fear of causing violent outbursts.

[463](#). "I renounce God," an expression found in Molière's play *Don Juan* (1665). It is similar to the English "Goddamn," found in Beaumarchais's 1784 play, *Le Mariage de Figaro*, act 3, scene 5. Figaro: "Devil take it, English is a marvelous language. A little of it will take you a long way. In England, if you've got God-damn, you can go anywhere and want for nothing. . . . Feel like a glass of good burgundy or claret? Just do this [*mimes opening a bottle*] and God-damn! they serve you a foaming beer in a handsome pewter pot." Figaro gives other examples and concludes: "It's quite obvious that God-damn! is the key to the language." Beaumarchais, *The Figaro Trilogy*, trans. David Coward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 147–48.

[464](#). See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 281–83.

[465](#). Maurice Barrès (1862–1923) denounced corruption in parliament and that surrounding the Panama Scandal in his novel *Leurs Figures* (1902), part 3 of his trilogy *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale*. In a letter to Barrès written in November 1903, Proust mentions Barrès's "sublime but ferocious *Figures des Panamistes*." *Correspondance* 4: 430.

[466](#). Urbain Le Verrier (1811–77) was an astronomer who, in August 1846, used his mathematical calculations of the orbit of Uranus to determine the presence of Neptune, a planet that was first observed on September 24, 1946, using Le Verrier's predictions.

[467](#). In a letter to Lucien Daudet, Léon's brother, written in November 1914, a few months after the war began, Proust says this: "The war alas has confirmed, endorsed, immortalized *L'Avant-guerre*." This is a reference to Léon Daudet's "collection of articles about German-Jewish spies in France since the Dreyfus Case, first published in a series by the anti-Semitic royalist paper *L'Action française*. Proust's remarks can be explained only (a) by his long-standing devotion to the Daudet family . . . and (b) by the fact that, as he confesses further on in the letter, he had not read the articles." Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 285 and n. 4.

[468](#). Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704) was the Bishop of Meaux and generally considered the greatest orator of his time based on his sermons and his funeral orations for members of the royalty, such as Henriette de France, Henriette d'Angleterre, and the Grand Condé. He also pointed out the evils of the theater, a genre especially popular at the court of Louis XIV, in the volume *Maximes et Réflexions sur la comédie* (1694).

[469](#). In the original, *les amours*, indicating cupids with bows and arrows. In Greek mythology, Adonis is a beautiful youth, whose attributes fit the context here. In a letter written in 1914, Proust told writer Henri Ghéon that Charlus was in love with Swann in high school. *Correspondance*, 13: 25.

[470](#). See her portrait by Elstir in *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 465–66.

[471](#). The Narrator met Pierre de Verjus, Comte de Crécy, in the twister at Balbec. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 530.

[472](#). Comte Robert de Montesquiou, the primary model for the Baron de Charlus, had his portrait painted by Whistler in 1891–92. This portrait, *Arrangement in Black and Gold*, is part of the Frick Collection in New York City. Proust wrote in a letter to Jacques-Émile Blanche, the painter who created the famous portrait of the novelist, that Whistler was one of those "consummate painters who are also delightful men of taste." Proust, *Correspondance*, 17: 394.

[473](#). Charlus is going down a list of historical figures who were reputed to be homosexual or bisexual. Molière is listed due to speculation about his relationship with the actor Michel Boyron, called Baron (1653–1729), the playwright's protégé. Baron was a handsome youth of seventeen when he joined the company and was soon cast as Molière's principal male characters. Proust's sources are either the letters of Charlotte-Élisabeth de Bavière (1652–1722), Duchesse d'Orléans, second wife of Monsieur, or the *Mémoires* of Saint-Simon. Her letters, *Correspondance complète de Madame* (la

Palatine), were published by Charpentier in Paris in 1863. The Comte de Vermandois (1667–83), son of Louis XIV and Mlle de la Vallière, was reputedly debauched by the Chevalier de Lorraine and his brother, Comte de Marsan. See *Letters of Madame*, 1: 302.

[474.](#) Prince Louis-Guillaume de Baden (1655–1707), godson of Louis XIV, was General of the Imperial Armies.

[475.](#) Antoine Ulrich, Duke of Brunswick (1624–1705), was a German prince who served in the Imperial Armies.

[476.](#) Charles de Bourbon-Condé, Comte de Charolais (1700–1760), was the grandson of the Grand Condé.

[477.](#) Louis-François, Duc de Boufflers (1644–1711), was a Maréchal de France.

[478.](#) Louis II de Condé, Grand Condé (1621–86), was considered a military genius.

[479.](#) Henri-Albert de Cossé, Duc de Brissac (1645–99), was the brother-in-law of Saint-Simon, according to whom Brissac's marriage was never successful, because "his tastes were too Italian." *Mémoires*, Pléiade, 1953, 1: 80. "Italian tastes" in this context refers to a widely held belief at the time that homosexuality was widespread in Italy.

[480.](#) Saint-Simon wrote that Monsieur's "tastes did not run to women." *Mémoires* 1: 33.

[481.](#) Louis Joseph de Bourbon, Duc de Vendôme (1654–1712), was a military officer who had sexual relations with his valets and military subordinates. *Mémoires*, Pléiade, 2: 573–74.

[482.](#) Amaury Goyon de Matignon, Marquis de La Moussaye (1601–63); according to another source, La Moussaye's companion was the Duc d'Enghien.

[483.](#) The song was noted by the translator of *Correspondance complète de Madame*, 1: 241–42. "My dear friend La Moussaye,/Ah, God, what weather!/We are going to perish in the flood." "No, our lives are not in danger,/We are Sodomites,/Only fire can kill us." In the margin of the manuscript, Proust wrote: "Stress the fact that homosexuality has never precluded bravery, from Caesar to Kitchener." The theme of the virile homosexual is found when we first meet Charlus, who was known for his athleticism and horror of effeminacy. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 357, 371. Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850–1916) was an Irish soldier and statesman distinguished as a military commander in Africa. In World War I, he was secretary for war. See Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, 508.

[484.](#) Claude Louis Hector, Duc de Villars (1653–1734), was a diplomat and officer who became Maréchal de France.

[485.](#) Prince Eugène de Savoie-Carignan (1663–1736), a soldier, was rumored to be the "mistress" of young men who called him Mme Putana. (Putana, in French *putain*, whore.) *Letters of Madame*, 2: 21.

[486.](#) François Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Conti, nephew of the Great Condé (1664–1709), is said to have enjoyed orgies with other men. *Letters of Madame*, 1: 308–9.

[487.](#) Tonkin is a region of North Vietnam where the French army fought Chinese invaders from 1883 to 1885. In the nineteenth century, France, England, and Germany all claimed portions of Morocco.

[488.](#) Paul Bourget (1852–1935) was a novelist and critic. Proust is alluding to *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1885), whose foreword states that "the particular states of mind of a new generation" are contained "in the seeds of the theories and dreams of the preceding generation." This is Bourget's theory of "psychological heritage." *La Prisonnière*, ed. Mauriac Dyer, 368, n. 3.

[489.](#) Nicolas du Blé, Marquis d'Huxelles, (1652–1730), was a Maréchal de France. The passage is from Saint-Simon's *Mémoires*, 2: 303. We have seen that Madame in her letters uses the nickname "Putana" for Prince Eugène.

[490.](#) The word for aunt in French is *tante*, which is also slang for an effeminate homosexual.

[491.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 52.

[492.](#) This is an approximate quotation from François de La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions diverses*, in *Œuvres complètes*, Pléiade, 2: 543. La Rochefoucauld (1613–80) was the author of the famous

Maximes (1665).

[493.](#) Avitus Bassianus (A.D. 204–22), known as Heliogabalus, was emperor of Rome 218–22. His reign was one of superstition and debauchery and ended with his assassination.

[494.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 203.

[495.](#) “Invert” is Proust’s preferred term for homosexual. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 351–52 and n. 177.

[496.](#) See *Swann’s Way*, 78, 173.

[497.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 263, 525.

[498.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 106.

[499.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 281.

[500.](#) This movement favored greater or absolute supremacy of papal over national or diocesan authority in the Roman Catholic Church.

[501.](#) *L’Action française* was a conservative daily newspaper that began publication in 1908 under the directorship of Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras. It favored a hereditary, antiparliamentary monarchy.

[502.](#) Claude Monet (1840–1926) was a leading Impressionist painter.

[503.](#) In the original *môme*, the usual meaning of which is kid or brat. However, the word is used in many slang terms. In this context, it denotes an effeminate, passive homosexual.

[504.](#) Proust anticipates the creation of gender studies, just as he had in a somewhat beguiling way anticipated gay marriages. For the latter, see Biche’s remark to Cottard in *Swann’s Way*, 231.

[505.](#) The Collège de France is a school founded in 1530 by François I. Its purpose is to teach the humanities independently of the university. The institution is located in Paris’s fifth arrondissement.

[506.](#) For the prohibition of drinking brandy or cognac, See *Swann’s Way*, 13.

[507.](#) Bonn is a city in Germany located on the Rhine river and the birthplace of Beethoven.

[508.](#) The recent French editions insert a sentence here: “These tears piqued the sculptor’s interest and he brought my attention to Charlie by giving me a sidelong glance.” It poses a problem because the Narrator has not yet entered the room. The addition of this sentence probably results from the fact that Proust did not revise the manuscript.

[509.](#) Camille Chevillard (1859–1923) was a composer who directed the Concerts Lamoureux beginning in 1897.

[510.](#) Emmanuel Chabrier (1841–94) was a composer and one of the models for Vinteuil. His works include operas and compositions for piano and for orchestra.

[511.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 540–44.

[512.](#) Proust inadvertently wrote “oncle” (uncle) here instead of father.

[513.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 610–18.

[514.](#) In Greek mythology, Pan was the god of the shepherds and flocks of Arcadia. A grotesque figure with horns, a hooked nose, human arms and hands, and the tail and legs of a goat, he protected flocks and chased nymphs. The word *panic* derives from his name.

[515.](#) A Tory was a member or supporter of a major British political party of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries favoring at first the Stuarts and later royal authority and the established church, while seeking to preserve the traditional political structure and defeat parliamentary reform.

[516.](#) *Esther* (1689) and *Andromaque* (1667) are two plays by Jean Racine. The first is based on the Book of Esther in the Bible, the second on the legend of Troy.

[517.](#) See Daniel 9: 21.

[518.](#) See Daniel 9: 24–25.

[519.](#) In the Book of Tobit, the Archangel Raphael takes young Tobias to his father Tobit’s house. Tobit is blind and Raphael cures him of his blindness. The Book of Tobit is canonical to Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, but not to Jews and Protestants (it was categorized as apocryphal by King James in translations). For the story of Bethesda and the purifying pool or miracle-healing pool,

see the Book of John, 5: 2–4. This pool was located near the Temple of Jerusalem and was used by the priests to purify the animals to be sacrificed. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 520.

520. See Swann's *Way*, 228, where it is the grandfather who knew the Verdurins.

521. Christopher Columbus (c. 1450–1506) was a Genoese navigator traditionally credited with having discovered America. Robert Peary (1856–1920) was a U.S. navy officer who for many years was credited with having discovered the North Pole.

522. Virgil's second *Eclogue* tells the story of the shepherd Corydon, who is in love with the young Alexis. The eclogue begins thus: "Corydon the shepherd was aflame for the fair Alexis, his master's pet, nor knew he what to hope." Virgil, *Eclogues*, trans. by H. R. Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 31.

523. Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846–1916) was born in Paris of Italian parents. In 1874, he became professor of Egyptology at the Collège de France and later director of explorations in Egypt, making valuable discoveries. In 1881, he discovered forty royal mummies near Dayr al-Bahri. He wrote many works on Egyptology.

524. In the original *charentonesque*, a reference to Charenton, a famous lunatic asylum located in what is now Saint-Maurice, France. The Marquis de Sade was its most famous inmate.

525. *A blanc d'Espagne* was a member of a group of legitimists who claimed that the true heirs to the French throne were the Spanish Bourbons, who were descended in direct line from Louis XIV through his grandson, Philip V of Spain. White is the color of the Bourbon dynasty and on the French flag of today represents the king.

526. Monseigneur Maurice Le Sage d'Hauteroche d'Hulst (1841–96) was the founder and rector in 1880 of the Catholic University of Paris, which became the Institut Catholique de Paris.

527. These essays by Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804–69) appeared each Monday from 1849 to 1869 in newspapers such as *Le Constitutionnel*, *Le Moniteur*, and *Le Temps*, then published in fifteen volumes (1851–62). He began his career as a poet before turning to literary criticism. He insisted that a man's life and his work be judged together. This method was strongly condemned by Proust in his essay *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (Against Sainte-Beuve). See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, p. 52, n. 117.

528. The statue of the Olympian Zeus (Jupiter) was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Erected on Mount Olympus by the Greek sculptor Phidias (490?–431? B.C.), the statue was said to have been made of gold and ivory and to measure sixty feet high. It was later moved to Constantinople, where it was destroyed in a fire. The story about the inscription of the ring may be apocryphal.

529. Proust is apparently thinking of Sainte-Beuve's book on Chateaubriand: *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire sous l'Empire* (1861), in which Sainte-Beuve expresses his regret that Chateaubriand was not more explicit about his love affairs in his posthumous autobiography, *Mémoires d'outre tombe* (1849–50). *La Prisonnière*, ed. Mauriac Dyer, 394, n. 1. In August 1921, Proust acquired the volumes of the *Causeries du lundi*, where Sainte-Beuve wrote about Chateaubriand. See *Correspondance* 20: 426 and n. 2.

530. In the original, the adage "En tout bien tout honneur."

531. Italian for secretly or privately.

532. Denis Diderot (1713–84) was a philosopher, encyclopedist, novelist, dramatist, and art critic. In his work *Satire 1* he quotes the first verse Ode 1, Book 3, by the Roman poet Horace (65–8 B.C.). The verse is *Iustum et tenacem propositi virum* (The man of firm and righteous will).

533. Gaston Boissier (1823–1908) was a historian of Roman antiquity. In his *Promenades archéologiques* (1880), he devoted chapter two to a tour of the Palatine, one of the seven hills of Rome. In chapter four, he writes about the villa of Hadrian (emperor A.D. 117–138) in Tibur, now Tivoli. Horace, Lucretius, and Virgil all praised the beauty of the countryside around Tivoli.

534. Augustus (63 B.C.–A.D. 14) the first Roman emperor, was the adopted son of his great-uncle Julius Caesar. Born Gaius Octavius, he took power in 31 B.C. after the civil war that followed

Caesar's death. Augustus's political and military reforms brought a period of peace, when the arts and literature flourished, notably in the works of Horace, Virgil, and Ovid.

535. Aspasia was the most celebrated Athenian hetaera, one of a class of highly cultivated courtesans in ancient Greece. She was the mistress of Pericles (c. 495–429 B.C.). Of considerable intellectual stature, she taught rhetoric and conversed with Socrates.

536. This is an allusion to two of La Fontaine's fables "Le Lion et le Rat" (The Lion and the Rat) and "La Colombe et la Fourmi" (The Dove and the Ant), *Fables*, Book 2: 11 and 12.

537. An approximate Latin quotation from Cicero's *Philippics* 3: 35: *quod di omen avertant* (may the gods avert the omen).

538. This is an allusion to a novel, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* (1881), by Anatole France. Bonnard is an elderly learned man, who early in the story is advised to buy the book *Clef des songes* (Key to dreams). He replies, "Yes, my friend, but those dreams and a thousand others besides, joyous and tragic, may be summed up in one, the Dream of Life."

539. The rue de l'Assomption is in the sixteenth arrondissement in Auteuil. In 1855, it was named for the congregation of the Augustine sisters, Augustines de l'Assomption, who established a convent there. Auteuil is a suburb of the western part of Paris.

540. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 565.

541. See *Swann's Way*, 182–89.

542. Albertine has stifled herself—or so the Narrator will deduce—from uttering the obscenity *me faire casser le pot*, "to go get myself buggered" (literally "to get my pot broken").

543. *Casser du sucre* means to denounce or talk about someone behind his or her back. The expressions *casser du bois sur quelqu'un* and *ce que je lui en ai cassé* mean "I really let him have it."

544. We do not know specifically what Albertine is referring to here.

545. Jean Cocteau, who was a friend of Proust, believed that some of the models for Albertine were young men. Here is what he wrote about this particular use of slang several decades after Proust's death: "I knew his 'captive'; a stupid bellboy whom he locked up in a room somewhere and encouraged to paint. . . . Only such a boy would have been capable of speaking the wretched phrase Marcel (i.e., the Narrator) puts in Albertine's mouth (*casser le pot*)."

The captive to whom Jean Cocteau is referring was Henri Rochat, who was not a bellboy but a waiter whom Proust had recruited from the Ritz. For more about this and other young men who may have served as models for Albertine, see Carter, *Proust in Love*.

546. In the early days of photography, pictures of oneself were considered private and to be shared only with family members and those closest to one. To give another your photograph would indicate a degree of intimacy that would be deemed inappropriate. See *The Guermantes Way*, 81, and Carter, *Marcel Proust*, 108.

547. That episode at Combray was a key moment in the Narrator's childhood, and as he indicates here, the primary cause of his inability to lead a normal, productive life.

548. René Descartes (1596–1650) was a philosopher, mathematician, and scientist. This expression comes from the first sentence of his *Discours de la méthode* (1637): *Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée* . . . (Good sense is of all things in the world the most equally distributed . . .) The remainder of the sentence makes clear that Descartes is being ironic. Descartes, *Œuvres et lettres*, Pléiade, 126.

549. Maurice Quentin de La Tour (1704–88) was a painter who worked solely in pastels and was famous for his portraits. In 1750, he became the king's painter and made portraits of the court and the world of the theater, arts, and letters.

550. This is an analgesic medication for inner ear pain.

551. Prodrôme is a word that is as uncommon in French as it is in English. It means a premonitory, a warning symptom of a disease.

552. Such depictions are seen on the porch of the cathedral of Laon and on the porch of the Booksellers at the cathedral of Rouen. Proust visited both cathedrals while doing research for his

translation of John Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens*, published in 1904. The description of the young girl asleep echoes, in its allusion to medieval funerary effigies, the Narrator's depiction of his grandmother, whose body death has transformed to that of a young maiden. See *The Guermentes Way*, 379.

553. Théophile Delcassé (1852–1923) was minister of foreign affairs from 1898 to 1905. He favored the Triple Entente, which linked Great Britain, France, and Russia against Germany, thus upsetting the balance of power in Europe. Kaiser Wilhelm II called for the resignation of Delcassé to avoid armed conflict. The Rouvier cabinet forced him to retire in June 1905.

554. The Balearic Islands are a Spanish archipelago in the western Mediterranean Sea. The four largest islands are Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza, and Formentera.

555. This is an approximate quotation from Mme de Sévigné's letter of October 25, 1679, to her daughter regarding Mme de Sévigné's son Charles.

556. That is, the telephone operators.

557. The word *charlatan* exists in French only as a masculine noun. We remember from other examples Françoise's habit of creating new forms of words. For instance, see *The Guermentes Way*, 19.

558. Utrecht is a city in the Netherlands where a series of treaties between France and other European countries were signed (1713–14), ending the War of the Spanish Succession, 1701–15. The melting of the silver is a reference to a practice used by Louis XIV, when the royal treasury was depleted.

559. Founded in 1740, the Pont-aux-Choux company produced fine china.

560. Jacques Roettiers de la Tour (1707–84) was a court silversmith who produced for Mme du Barry (1743–93), the favorite of Louis XV, a silver service decorated with roses and myrtle.

561. See note 28. When Proust wrote this passage in February 1916, he consulted Reynaldo Hahn's sister Maria: "I have often wanted to ask your advice about female costume, not for any mistress but for fictional heroines. . . . Do you know at least whether for his dressing-gowns Fortuny ever uses as motifs those coupled birds drinking for example from a vase, which are so recurrent on the Byzantine capitals in St Mark's. And do you also know whether there are pictures in Venice . . . showing cloaks or dresses from which Fortuny drew (or might have drawn) inspiration. I would find a reproduction of the painting and see if it might inspire *me*." Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 335. Maria lent Proust a book about the Venetian painter Vittore Carpaccio (c. 1460–c. 1525/26) with two of the paintings that had apparently inspired Fortuny, *The Holy Cross* (1494) and *The Legend of St. Ursula* (1497–98),

562. Here Proust has in mind Carpaccio's depiction of the sumptuous costumes and decors created for Venetian festivals in his *La Prédication de St. Étienne Jérusalem* (Louvre) and *L'Ambassade des Amazones à Thésée* (Musée Jacquemart-André). Tiziano Vecelli, known as Titian (1488 or 1490–1576), a leading Venetian painter. For such a dress depicted by Titian, Karpeles proposes *Portrait of a Lady* (c. 1555, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). See Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust*, 251.

563. José-Maria Sert (1876–1945) was a Spanish painter and designer for the Ballets Russes and a personal friend of Proust. Léon Bakst (1866–1924) and Alexander Nikolaïevitch Benoit (1870–1960) were Russian painters and designers for the Ballets Russes.

564. In the early 1900s, the Aeolian Corporation, the world's leading manufacturer of pianos, created a self-playing piano that could also be played the same way as a traditional piano.

565. Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) was a Spanish painter and an especially fine portraitist. In Proust's day, the Louvre exhibited his portraits of two Infantas (daughters of ruling Iberian monarchs): Marguerite-Maria and Maria Teresa.

566. In a letter written in January 1914, Proust complained to Mme Straus about the unavailability of certain rolls: "My consolation is music, when I'm not too sad to listen to it: I've completed the theatrophone with a pianola. Unfortunately they happen not to have the pieces I want to play. Beethoven's sublime XIVth quartet doesn't appear among the rolls." Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 221.

[567](#). Proust uses the feminine form for friends, *amies*, in keeping with his sometimes imagining the little phrase of Vinteuil's sonata as a *passante*, a woman passing by.

[568](#). In the original, *fées*, fairies or elves. Scott Moncrieff chose the close but less common English equivalent, "fay."

[569](#). In this passage, as elsewhere, Proust uses synesthesia, the stimulation of one sense by another. He uses colors, as we have seen, to distinguish Vinteuil's sonata from the septet. In 1895, when Proust was twenty-three, he wrote in a letter to Suzette Lemaire: "I believe the essence of music is to arouse the mysterious depths (which literature and generally speaking all finite modes of expression that make use either of words and consequently of ideas, which are determinate things, or of objects—painting, sculpture—cannot express) of our souls, which begins where all the arts aimed at the finite stop and where science as well stops, and which for that reason can be termed religious. This doesn't make much sense when said so quickly, it deserves a longer conversation." Proust, *Selected Letters*, 1: 93.

[570](#). Proust's word is *monotonie*, meaning uniformity or sameness and refers to the notion of "identical beauty" that follows.

[571](#). Jules-Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly (1808–89) poet, novelist, and critic who excelled in depicting the atmosphere of the wild, lonely Cotentin country in Lower Normandy. The works referred to here are *l'Ensorcelée* (The bewitched woman, 1854); *Le Rideau Cramoisi* (The red curtain), the first story in the collection, *Les Diaboliques* (1874); *Une Vieille Maîtresse* (A former mistress, 1851). Aimée de Spens, La Clotte, La Vellini, and the Shepherd are characters in Barbey d'Aurevilly's stories of tragic love affairs.

[572](#). Thomas Hardy (1840–1928) was an English novelist whose basic theme is the struggle of man against the neutral, indifferent force that rules the world. Before becoming a novelist, Hardy was an architect, and a number of his characters are related to this profession.

[573](#). See *Swann's Way*, 249.

[574](#). Albertine had recently denied knowing Gilberte, but earlier said that they took a class together. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 93–94.

[575](#). *Jude the Obscure* was published in 1895. The title character, Jude Fawley, a self-taught man, supports his passion for learning by working as a stonemason.

[576](#). Hardy published *The Well-Beloved* in 1892. Jocelyn Pierston, son of an old stonemason, becomes a successful sculptor in London and sometimes watches the stones from his birthplace, the Isle of Slingers, being unloaded on the wharves of the Thames.

[577](#). In Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), there is a love scene where Stephen Smith and Elfride Swancourt are seated on the tomb of Elfride's first suitor, a farmer who wanted to marry her, but who was considered not good enough. Later, on the train taking Stephen and Henry to Cornwall, where each man hopes to resume his courtship of Elfride, they discover that the train that carries them also carries her coffin.

[578](#). In Hardy's *The Well-Beloved*, Jocelyn falls in love with three island women: Avice Caro, her daughter, and her granddaughter. In his *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Elfride Swancourt has three suitors.

[579](#). In Stendhal's novel *The Red and the Black*, the hero, Julien Sorel, is imprisoned in a tower after his attempted assassination of Mme de Renal. And in Stendhal's other famous novel, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the hero, Fabrice del Dongo, is also imprisoned in a high tower. The Abbé Blanès, who tutors young Fabrice, has a passion for astrology and spends every night at the top of his tower. He grants Fabrice the privilege of coming up to his tower to make astrological observations.

[580](#). The characters mentioned here are from Dostoyevsky's novels *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868), and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80).

[581](#). One of the principal characters in *The Idiot*.

[582](#). A rival to Nastasya Filippovna for the love of Prince Myshkin.

[583](#). In *The Idiot*, Ganya is supposedly engaged to Nastasya. His father, General Ivolgin, is a buffoon and a liar. When Nastasya visits their home, she cruelly calls the old man's bluff.

584. Grushenka and the following characters are from *The Brothers Karamazov*. During the course of the novel Grushenka is deliberately made to appear unchaste, and it is only fairly well along in the narrative that it becomes apparent that she has really never been a woman of loose morals.

585. Proust admired Carpaccio's paintings when he visited Venice in 1900 and Rembrandt's *Bathsheba*, which hung in the Louvre.

586. A principal character in *The Idiot*. His remark to Nastasya, "Surely you are not like that," occurs when they are in Ganya's home and she places herself in an unfavorable light by seeming to sell herself to the highest bidder.

587. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Alyosha is the youngest son, deeply religious, and the central figure in the novel. He is present at the confrontation between Grushenka and Katerina.

588. Michael Lieb, known as Munkacsy (1844–1900), was a native of Hungary who lived from 1872 to 1896 in Paris. His painting *Last Day of a Condemned Man* was exhibited in the 1872 salon.

589. "Dvornik" is a noun borrowed from Russian meaning hall porter or doorman.

590. In *The Idiot*, Rogozhin is a jealous, impulsive character who believes that Myshkin is his rival for the love of Nastasya. When Myshkin first sees Rogozhin's house, in which Nastasya is later murdered, he is struck by its strange and ominous appearance.

591. Nikolai Gogol (1809–52), Russian poet, dramatist, and novelist, author of *Dead Souls*, considered the creator of the modern novel in Russia.

592. Paul de Kock (1793–1871), a writer of popular, rollicking novels that are often frankly coarse and risqué, such as *Georgette*, *Mon Voisin Raymond*, and *L'Amant de la lune*. Proust uses the examples to reject the classifications created by literary historians, categories that seem too broad, such as the "modern Russian novel" or the "popular novel."

593. There are several scenes in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865–69) that occur during carriage rides. Proust is perhaps thinking of the scene with Prince Bezukhov and Prince Bolkonsky.

594. There is a gap here that Proust intended no doubt to fill. The examples the Narrator is searching for can be found earlier in the novel. For the Dostoyevsky side of Mme de Sévigné, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 252. Another example of showing the effect before the cause is the description of the rain in *Swann's Way*, 115.

595. Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (1741–1803) whose novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) portrays a professional seducer and his victims, although he was himself known to be a faithful and attentive husband.

596. Stéphanie du Crest de Saint-Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis (1746–1830), author of *Contes moraux* (1802) and books about the education of children. She was the governess of the son of Philippe-Égalité and the latter's mistress.

597. Two middle lines were omitted by Proust: "Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie/N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins/Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins/C'est que notre âme, hélas, n'est pas assez hardie." "If rape and arson, poison and the knife/Have not yet stitched their ludicrous designs/Onto the banal buckram of our fates/It is because our souls lack enterprise!" *Les Fleurs du mal*, trans. by Richard Howard (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982), 5. These lines are from Baudelaire's preface "To the reader" in the collection of poems *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857).

598. Lebedyev, in *The Idiot*, is a devious and cunning buffoon who sadistically pursues Ivolgin, Ganya's father. He is portrayed as an inventor of great tales but is basically a harmless old fool. Karamazov is a cruel drunk, who leads a life of debauchery. There is no character by the name of Segrev. Proust apparently was thinking of Captain Snegiryov, a character in *The Brothers Karamazov*. He is a destitute man whose spirit is broken by misfortunes.

599. Rembrandt's painting offers a variety of faces: the captain and the lieutenant, the standard bearers, a drummer, a misshapen little page, a little girl.

600. Mitya (Dmitri) is the eldest son of the Karamazovs. At one point in the novel, he takes Captain Snegiryov by the beard and pulls him out of a tavern.

601. Krassotkin is a young boy who influences the other boys and becomes Alyosha's disciple.

[602.](#) Old man Karamazov had seduced Lizaveta, the town's deformed idiot, who gave birth to Smerdyakov.

[603.](#) The Cathedral of Orvieto dates from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The statues on the façade depict scenes from Genesis such as the creation of Eve. They are primarily the work of the Italian sculptor Lorenzo Maitami, who died in 1330.

[604.](#) Smerdyakov murders his father and then hangs himself.

[605.](#) Although Racine's play *Esther* is mentioned, the assignment focused primarily on his play *Athalie*. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 535.

[606.](#) One of the two hypotheses mentioned early: is art reality or illusion? And he wonders the same about the soul. See pages 406–7.

[607.](#) This is a reprise of the analysis that was interrupted earlier, before the literary conversation with Albertine.

[608.](#) For the magic lantern, see *Swann's Way*, 10.

[609.](#) Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764), composer of instrumental, vocal, and dramatic works.

[610.](#) Alexander Borodin (1833–87), Russian composer of the opera *Prince Igor*; he also wrote several symphonies. Proust alludes here to Borodin's symphonic poem *In the Steppes of Central Asia* (1880).

[611.](#) Martyred in 232, Cecilia was the patron saint of music. Rubens, in his painting of Saint Cecilia, depicted her at an organ. This image comes from one used earlier by Proust in an article for *Le Figaro*, "Impressions de route en automobile." In that piece, Proust's chauffeur, Alfred Agostinelli, works the instruments of the automobile as Saint Cecilia did those of the organ.

[612.](#) For the quasi-comic scene when the Narrator kisses Albertine for the first time, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 556–57.

[613.](#) This refers to Swann seeing Odette as a work of art, when he notices her resemblance to Jethro's daughter Zipporah in Botticelli's painting. The Narrator will avoid Swann's error of mistaking eros for art. See *Swann's Way*, 254–55.

[614.](#) The North Italian Bernadino Luini (c. 1480–1532), a student of Leonardo da Vinci, painted frescoes that depicted bland, vapid women. His female figures are usually depicted as sweet, fair, and charming.

[615.](#) Giorgione (c. 1478–1510) was an Italian painter who lived in the vicinity of Venice. "The type of feminine beauty portrayed by him is exemplified in the sensuous nudes in the painting *Concert Champêtre*, which hung in the Louvre's Salon Carré in Proust's day. Women wearing jewels and fine dresses are more typical of Veronese." Vogely, *A Proust Dictionary*, 280. The Narrator associates Giorgione with his desire to go to Venice.

[616.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 282–84.

[617.](#) This is Paris's vast park consisting of more than two thousand acres in the western section of the city. In Proust's day, it was a popular and elegant gathering place.

[618.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 317.

[619.](#) Proust's word here is *recherche* in the phrase *à la recherche du passé*. As in the novel's title, *recherche* (which in French means both "search" and "research") indicates a more active, probing effort to regain and comprehend the Narrator's life experience. Scott Moncrieff, in keeping with his choice of a general title, translated this as "remembrance of the past."

[620.](#) This is similar to Swann's realization that he had wasted years of his life in pursuit of Odette, a woman who was not even "his type." See *Swann's Way*, 435.

[621.](#) The Lydian mode is an arrangement of tones of the octave characteristic of Gregorian chant.

[622.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 576.

[623.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls*, 562.

[624.](#) Giotto di Bondone (1276–1337) was an Italian artist who was commissioned in 1303 to paint frescoes in the Arena chapel in Padua.

[625.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 91.

- [626](#). This library in Milan has a collection of ancient manuscripts and editions.
- [627](#). See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 69.
- [628](#). These lines are from Racine's play *Esther*, act 2, scene 7. As is often the case, Proust is quoting from memory. "Judge how, incensed against me, that great forehead/Must then have cast into my troubled soul such dread./Alas! Where is the heart audacious that defies/Unmoved those lightnings starting from your eyes?"
- [629](#). See *Swann's Way*, 15.
- [630](#). For the death of the grandmother, see *The Guermentes Way*, 369–79.
- [631](#). The Musée du Luxembourg, whose collection includes works by living artists, is located in a building on the grounds of the Luxembourg palace.
- [632](#). Paintings that come to mind are Renoir's *Moulin de la Galette* (1876) and *Mme Charpentier and her Children* (1878).
- [633](#). Paintings suggested by such a scene include Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* and Renoir's *Baigneuses* and *Baigneuses dans la forêt*.
- [634](#). The aviator becomes the symbol of the artist both as we see here in an actual sighting and elsewhere in the novel through metaphors or analogies. For a detailed discussion of this, see "The Artist and the Aviator" in William C. Carter, *The Proustian Quest* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 187–205. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 470–71.
- [635](#). Once a gateway to the Bois de Boulogne at the end of the avenue de la Grande Armée, the Porte Maillot is now the name of the intersection located between the sixteenth and seventeenth arrondissements.
- [636](#). Chateaubriand calls the moon *bleu* in the *Génie du Christianisme*, book 5, chapter 12.
- [637](#). "Eviradnus" is a poem in *La Légende des siècles*. Line 607 reads: "La lune est dans son plein,/D'une blanche lueur la clairière est baignée." Proust is apparently mistaken here where the "full moon/bathes the clearing in a white light."
- [638](#). "La Fête chez Thérèse" is a poem from Hugo's *Les Contemplations*. The last line of book 1 reads: "Le clair de lune bleu qui baignait l'horizon" (The blue moonlight was bathing the horizon).
- [639](#). In "La Lune offensée," Baudelaire describes the moon as a yellow domino: "Sous ton domino jaune . . ." (Beneath your yellow domino . . .).
- [640](#). Charles Leconte de Lisle (1818–94) was a poet called the father of the Parnassians. The metallic moonlight is suggested in "Le Dernier des Maourys," of which lines 15–16 read: "Et déjà la lueur de la lune invisible/Tremblant à l'Orient vaguement argenté" (And already the light of the invisible moon/Shimmered in the East lightly silvered).
- [641](#). In Victor Hugo's poem "Booz endormi," the poet depicts the crescent moon as a golden sickle lying in a field of stars: "Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles" (That golden sickle in the field of stars).
- [642](#). Les Rochers is the name of Mme de Sévigné's property in Brittany.
- [643](#). See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 256–59.
- [644](#). There is such a village, Saint-Jean-de-la-Haize in the département of Manche near Avranches. The slight difference in spelling would not change the pronunciation.
- [645](#). There are two villages with the name Gourville in France; one in the département of Charente and the other in Seine-et-Oise.
- [646](#). "A terrible majesty makes me invisible to my subjects." These lines are from Racine's play *Esther*, act 1, scene 3.
- [647](#). In mythology, the Ocean was a great river encircling the earth.
- [648](#). See *Swann's Way*, 445.
- [649](#). See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 565.

À LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU IN SEARCH OF LOST
TIME

The Fugitive

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Chapter 1

Grief and Oblivion

“Mademoiselle Albertine has gone!” How much further does anguish penetrate in psychology than psychology itself! A moment ago, as I lay analyzing my feelings, I had believed that this separation without having seen each other again was precisely what I wished, and, as I compared the mediocrity of the pleasures that Albertine afforded me with the richness of the desires that she prevented me from realizing, had felt that I was being subtle, had concluded that I no longer wished to see her, that I no longer loved her. But now these words “Mademoiselle Albertine has gone” had produced in my heart an anguish such that I would not be able to endure it much longer. And so what I had believed to be nothing to me was simply my whole life. How ignorant we are of ourselves. The first thing to be done was to make my anguish cease at once; tender toward myself as my mother had been toward my dying grandmother, I said to myself with that eagerness that we feel to prevent a person whom we love from suffering: “Be patient for just a moment, we will find something to take the pain away, don’t fret, we are not going to allow you to suffer like this.”¹ It was among ideas of this sort that my instinct of self-preservation sought for the first balm to lay upon my open wound: “None of this is of the slightest importance, because I am going to have her brought back here at once. I must think first how I am to do it, but in any case she will be here this evening. Therefore, it is useless to worry myself.” “None of this is of the slightest importance,” I had not been content with giving myself this assurance, I had tried to convey the same impression to Françoise by not allowing her to see my suffering, because, even at the moment when I was feeling so keen an anguish, my love did not forget how important it was that it should appear a happy love, a mutual love, especially in the eyes of Françoise, who, since she disliked Albertine, had always doubted her sincerity. Yes, a moment ago, before Françoise came into the room, I had believed that I no longer loved Albertine, I had believed that I was leaving nothing out of account; a precise analyst, I had supposed that I knew the state of my own heart. But our intelligence, however great it may be, cannot

perceive the elements that compose the heart and that remain unsuspected so long as, from the volatile state in which they generally exist, a phenomenon capable of isolating them has not subjected them to the first stages of solidification. I had been mistaken in thinking that I could see clearly into my own heart. But this knowledge that had not been given me by the finest perceptions of the mind had now been brought to me, hard, glittering, strange, like a crystallized salt, by the abrupt reaction of pain. I was so much in the habit of having Albertine with me, and I suddenly saw a new aspect of Habit.² Hitherto I had regarded it chiefly as an annihilating force that suppresses the originality and even our awareness of our perceptions; now I saw it as a dread deity, so riveted to ourselves, its insignificant face so encrusted in our heart, that if it detaches itself, if it turns away from us, this deity that we could barely distinguish inflicts on us sufferings more terrible than any other and is then as cruel as death itself.

The first thing to be done was to read Albertine's letter, since I was anxious to think of some way of making her return. I felt that this lay in my power, because, as the future is what exists only in our mind, it seems to us to be still alterable by the intervention *in extremis*³ of our will. But, at the same time, I remembered that I had seen forces other than my own act upon it, forces against which, even if I had been allowed more time, I could never have prevailed. Of what use is it that the hour has not yet struck if we can do nothing to influence what will happen? When Albertine was living in the house I had been quite determined to retain the initiative in our parting. And now she had gone. I opened her letter. It ran as follows:

“My dear friend,

Forgive me for not having dared to say to you in person what I am now writing, but I am such a coward, I have always been so afraid in your presence that even when I tried to force myself I could never find the courage to do so. This is what I should have said to you. Our life together has become impossible; indeed you must have seen from your outburst the other evening, that there had been a change in our relations. What we were able to smooth over that night would become irreparable in a few days' time. It is better for us, therefore, since we have had the good fortune to be reconciled, to part as friends. That is why, my darling, I am sending you this note, and beg you to be so kind as to forgive me if I am causing you a little grief when you think of the immensity of mine. Dearest one, I do not wish

to become your enemy, it will be bad enough to become by degrees, and very soon, a stranger to you; and so, as I have absolutely made up my mind, before sending you this letter by Françoise, I will have asked her to let me have my trunks. Adieu, I leave with you the best part of myself. Albertine.”

“All this means nothing,” I told myself, “It is even better than I thought, for as she doesn’t mean a word of what she says she has obviously written her letter only to give me a severe shock, to frighten me, to stop me behaving horribly toward her. I must come up with a plan at once, so that Albertine will be back here this evening. It is sad to think that the Bontemps are unscrupulous people who make use of their niece to extort money from me. But what does that matter? Even if, to bring Albertine back here this evening, I have to give half my fortune to Mme Bontemps, we will still have enough left, Albertine and I, to live in comfort.” And, at the same time, I calculated whether I had time to go out that morning and order the yacht and the Rolls-Royce that she coveted, quite forgetting, now that all my hesitation had vanished, that I had decided that it would be unwise to give them to her.⁴ “Even if Mme Bontemps’s support is not sufficient, if Albertine refuses to obey her aunt and makes it a condition of her returning that she will enjoy complete independence, well, however much it may distress me, I will leave her to herself; she will go out by herself, whenever she chooses. One must be prepared to make sacrifices, however painful they may be, for the thing to which one attaches most importance, which is, in spite of everything that I decided this morning, on the strength of my precise and absurd arguments, that Albertine will continue to live here.” Can I say moreover that to give her that freedom would have been altogether painful to me? I would be lying. Already I had often felt that the anguish of leaving her free to misbehave far away from me was perhaps even less than that sort of misery that I used to feel when I sensed that she was bored in my company, under my roof. No doubt at the actual moment of her asking me to let her go somewhere, the act of allowing her to go, with the idea in my mind of an organized orgy, would have been agonizing for me. But to say to her: “Take our yacht, or the train, go away for a month, to some place that I have never seen, where I will know nothing of what you are doing,” this had often appealed to me, owing to the thought that, by force of contrast, when she was away from me, she would prefer my society, and would be happy to return. “This return is certainly what she

herself desires; she does not in the least demand that freedom on which, moreover, by offering her every day some new pleasure, I would easily succeed in imposing, day by day, a further restriction. No, what Albertine has wanted is for me to stop being unbearable to her, and above all—like Odette with Swann—for me to make up my mind to marry her. Once she is married, her independence will cease to matter to her; we will stay here together, in perfect happiness!” No doubt this meant giving up any thought of Venice. But the places for which we have most longed, such as Venice (all the more so, the most agreeable hostesses like Duchesse de Guermantes, amusements like the theater), how pale, insignificant, dead they become when we are tied to the heart of another person by a bond so painful that it prevents us from tearing ourselves away! “Albertine is perfectly right, for that matter, about our marriage. Mamma herself was saying that all these postponements were ridiculous. Marrying her is what I ought to have done long ago, it is what I will have to do, it is what has made her write her letter without meaning a word of it; it is only to bring about our marriage that she has postponed for a few hours what she must desire as keenly as I desire it: her return to this house. Yes, that is what she wanted, that is the purpose of her action,” my compassionate reason assured me; but I felt that, in telling me this, my reason was still maintaining the same hypothesis that it had adopted from the start. Whereas I felt that it was the other hypothesis that had invariably proved correct. No doubt this second hypothesis would never have been so bold as to formulate in so many words that Albertine could have had intimate relations with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend. And yet, when I was overwhelmed by the invasion of those terrible tidings, as the train slowed down before stopping at Parville station,⁵ it was the second hypothesis that had already been verified. This hypothesis had never, in the interval, conceived the idea that Albertine might leave me of her own accord, in this fashion, and without warning me and giving me time to prevent her departure. But all the same if, after the immense new leap that life had just made me take, the reality that confronted me was as novel as the one that is presented by the discovery of a scientist, by the inquiries of a prosecuting attorney or the researches of a historian into the mystery of a crime or a revolution, this reality while exceeding the meager provisions of my second hypothesis nevertheless fulfilled them. This second hypothesis was not an intellectual one, and the panic fear that I had felt on the evening when Albertine had refused to kiss me, the night when I had

heard the sound of her window being opened,⁶ that fear was not based upon reason. But—and what follows will show this more clearly, as many episodes must have indicated it already—the fact that our intelligence is not the most subtle, the most powerful, the most appropriate instrument for grasping the truth is only one more reason for beginning with the intelligence, and not with a subconscious intuition, a ready-made faith in presentiments. It is life that, little by little, case by case, enables us to observe that what is most important to our heart, or to our mind, is learned not by reasoning but by other powers. And then it is intelligence itself that, taking note of their superiority, abdicates to them through reasoning and consents to become their collaborator and their servant. It is faith confirmed by experiment. The unforeseen calamity with which I found myself grappling, it seemed to me that it was also something that I had already known (as I had known of Albertine's friendship with a pair of lesbians), from having read it in so many signs in which (notwithstanding the contrary affirmations of my reason, based upon Albertine's own statements) I had discerned the weariness, the horror that she felt at having to live in that state of slavery, signs traced as though in invisible ink behind her sad, submissive eyes, upon her cheeks suddenly inflamed with an unaccountable blush, in the sound of the window that had suddenly been flung open. No doubt I had not dared to interpret them in their full significance or to form a definite idea of her sudden departure. I had thought, with a mind kept in equilibrium by Albertine's presence, only of a departure arranged by myself at an undetermined date, that is to say a date situated in a nonexistent time; consequently I had had merely the illusion of thinking of a departure, just as people imagine that they are not afraid of death when they think of it while they are in good health and actually do no more than introduce a purely negative idea into a healthy state, which the approach of death would precisely alter. Besides, the idea of Albertine's departure on her own initiative might have occurred to my mind a thousand times over, in the clearest, the most sharply defined form, and I would no more have suspected what, in relation to myself, that is to say in reality, that departure would be, what an unprecedented, agonizing, unknown thing, how entirely novel a calamity. Of her departure, had I foreseen it, I might have gone on thinking incessantly for years on end, and yet all my thoughts of it, placed end to end, would not have been comparable for an instant, not merely in intensity but in kind, with the unimaginable hell the curtain of which

Françoise had raised for me when she said: “Mademoiselle Albertine has gone.” In order to form a picture of an unknown situation, our imagination borrows elements that are already familiar and, for that reason, cannot accurately picture it. But our sensibility, even in its most physical form, receives, as it were the wake of the thunderbolt, the original and for long indelible imprint of the novel event. And I scarcely dared to say to myself that, if I had foreseen this departure, I would perhaps have been incapable of picturing it to myself in all its horror, or indeed, with Albertine informing me of it, and myself threatening, imploring her, of preventing it! How far removed from me now was the desire to go to Venice! Just as, long ago at Combray, had been the desire to know Mme de Guermantes when the moment came at which I longed for one thing only, to have Mamma in my room. And it was indeed all these anxieties that I had felt ever since my childhood, which, at the bidding of this new anguish, had come hastening to reinforce it, to amalgamate themselves with it in a homogeneous mass that was suffocating me.

To be sure, the physical blow that such a parting strikes at the heart, and which, because of that terrible capacity for registering things with which the body is endowed, makes our pain somehow contemporaneous with all the epochs in our life in which we have suffered; to be sure, this blow at the heart upon which the woman speculates a little perhaps—so little compunction do we show for the sufferings of other people—who is anxious to give the maximum intensity to the regret she causes, whether it be that, merely hinting at an imaginary departure, she is seeking only to demand better conditions, or that, leaving us forever—forever!—she desires to wound us, or, in order to avenge herself, or to continue to be loved, or to enhance the memory that she will leave behind her, to rend asunder the web of lassitude, of indifference that she has felt being woven about her—to be sure, this blow at our heart, we had vowed that we would avoid it, had assured ourselves that we would end it well. But it is rarely indeed that we do end it well, for, if all was well, we would never part. And besides, the woman to whom we show the utmost indifference feels nevertheless in an obscure fashion that while we have been growing tired of her, by virtue of an identical force of habit, we have grown more and more attached to her, and she reflects that one of the essential elements in a good parting is to warn the other person before one goes. But she is afraid, if she warns us, of preventing her own departure. Every woman feels that if her power over a

man is great, the only way to leave him is sudden flight: a fugitive precisely because a queen. To be sure, there is an extraordinary difference between the lassitude that she inspired a moment ago and, because she has gone, this furious desire to have her back again. But for this, apart from those that have been given in the course of this work and others that will be given later on, there are reasons. For one thing, her departure occurs as often as not at the moment when our indifference—real or imagined—is greatest, at the extreme point of the oscillation of the pendulum. The woman says to herself: “No, this sort of thing cannot go on any longer,” precisely because the man speaks of nothing but leaving her or thinks of nothing else; and it is she who leaves him. Then, the pendulum swinging back to its other extreme, the distance is all the greater. In an instant it returns to this point; once more, apart from all the reasons that have been given, it is so natural. Our heart still beats; and besides, the woman who has gone is no longer the same as the woman who was with us. Her life under our roof, all too well known, is suddenly enlarged by the addition of the lives with which she is inevitably to be associated, and it is perhaps to associate herself with them that she has left us. So that this new richness of the life of the woman who has gone reacts upon the woman who was with us and was perhaps planning her departure. To the sequence of psychological facts that we are able to deduce and that form part of her life with us, our too evident boredom in her company, our jealousy also (and the effect of which is that the men who have been left by a number of women have been left almost always in the same way because of their character and of certain always identical reactions that can be calculated: everyone has his own way of being betrayed, as he has his own way of catching cold), to this sequence that is not too mysterious for us there doubtless corresponded a sequence of facts of which we were unaware. She must for some time past have been keeping up relations, written, or spoken or through messengers, with some man, or some woman, have been awaiting some signal that we may perhaps have given her ourselves, unwittingly, when we said: “X called yesterday to see me,” if she had arranged with X that on the eve of the day when she was to join him he was to call on me. How many possible hypotheses! Possible only. I constructed the truth so well, but in the realm of possibility only, that, having one day opened, and then by mistake, a letter addressed to one of my mistresses, from this letter that was written in a code, and said: “Still waiting for a signal to go to the Marquis de Saint-Loup; let me know

tomorrow by telephone,” I reconstructed a sort of projected flight; the name of the Marquis de Saint-Loup was there only as a substitute for some other name, for my mistress did not know Saint-Loup well enough, but had heard me speak of him, and moreover the signature was some sort of nickname, without any intelligible form. As it happened, the letter was addressed not to my mistress but to another person in the building who bore a different name that had been misread. The letter was written not in code, but in bad French, because it was written by an American woman, who was indeed a friend of Saint-Loup as he himself told me. And the odd way in which this American woman wrote certain letters had given the appearance of a nickname to a name that was quite genuine, only foreign. And so I had on that occasion been entirely mistaken in my suspicions. But the intellectual structure that had in my mind combined these facts, all of them false, was itself so accurate, so inflexible a form of the truth that when three months later my mistress (who had at that time been meaning to spend the rest of her life with me) left me, it was in a manner absolutely identical with the one that I had imagined on the former occasion. A letter arrived, containing the same peculiarities that I had wrongly attributed to the former letter, but this time it was indeed meant as a signal and Albertine had thus been premeditating for a long time her flight. This calamity was the greatest that I had experienced in my life. And, when all was said, the suffering that it caused me was perhaps even exceeded by my curiosity to learn the causes of this calamity: whom Albertine had desired and gone to meet. But the sources of great events are like those of rivers, in vain do we explore the earth’s surface, we can never find them. I have not said (because at the time it had seemed to me simply affectation and ill humor, what Françoise called “a fit of sulks”) that, from the day on which she had ceased to kiss me,⁷ she had gone about as though tormented by a devil, stiffly erect, unbending, saying the simplest things in a sorrowful tone, slow in her movements, never once smiling. I cannot say that there was any concrete proof of conspiracy with the outside world. Françoise told me long afterward that, having gone into Albertine’s room two days before her departure, she had found it empty, the curtains drawn, but had sensed from the atmosphere of the room and the noise that the window was open. And indeed she had found Albertine on the balcony. But it is hard to say with whom she could have been communicating from there, and moreover the drawn curtains screening the open window could doubtless be explained by her knowing

that I was afraid of drafts, and by the fact that, even if the curtains afforded me little protection, they would prevent Françoise from seeing from the corridor that the shutters had been opened so early. No, I can see nothing except one trifling incident that proves merely that on the day before her departure she knew that she was leaving. For during the day she took from my room without my noticing it a large quantity of wrapping paper and packing cloth that was kept there, and in which she spent the whole night packing her innumerable peignoirs and dressing gowns so that she might leave the house in the morning. This was the only incident; that was all. I cannot attach any importance to her having repaid me that evening, almost by force, a thousand francs that she owed me; there is nothing unusual in that, for she was extremely scrupulous about money.

Yes, she took the wrapping paper the previous night, but it was not only then that she knew that she was going to leave me! For it was not resentment that made her leave me, but her determination, already formed, to leave me, to abandon the life of which she had dreamed, that gave her that air of resentment. A resentful air, almost solemnly cold toward me, except on the last evening when, after staying in my room longer than she had intended, she said—a remark that surprised me, coming from her who had always sought to postpone the moment of parting—she said to me from the door: “Adieu, my dear; Adieu, my dear.” But I did not take any notice of this at the time. Françoise told me that the next morning when Albertine informed her that she was going (but this, for that matter, may be explained also by exhaustion for she had not undressed and had spent the whole night packing everything, except the things for which she had to ask Françoise since they were not in her bedroom or her dressing room), she was still so sad, so much more erect, so much stiffer than during the previous days that Françoise, when Albertine said to her: “Adieu, Françoise,” almost expected to see her fall to the ground. When we are told anything like this, we realize that the woman who appealed to us so much less than any of the women whom we meet so easily in the course of the briefest outing, the woman who makes us resent our having to sacrifice them to herself, is on the contrary she whom now we would a thousand times rather possess. For the choice lies no longer between a certain pleasure—which has become by force of habit, and perhaps by the insignificance of its object, almost nothing—and other pleasures, which tempt and thrill us, but between these

latter pleasures and something that is far stronger than they, compassion for suffering.

When I vowed to myself that Albertine would be back in the house before night, I had proceeded as quickly as possible to cover with a new belief the open wound from which I had torn the belief that I had lived with until then. But however rapidly my instinct of self-preservation might have acted, I had, when Françoise spoke to me, been left for an instant without relief, and it was useless my knowing now that Albertine would return that same evening, the pain that I had felt in the instant in which I had not yet assured myself of her return (the instant that had followed the words: “Mademoiselle Albertine has asked for her trunks, Mademoiselle Albertine has gone”), this pain reawoke in me of its own accord as keen as it had been before, that is to say as if I had still been unaware of Albertine’s immediate return. However, it was essential that she should return, but of her own accord. In every hypothesis, to appear to be taking the first step, to be begging her to return would be to defeat my own purpose. To be sure, I did not have the strength to give her up as I had given up Gilberte. Even more than to see Albertine again, what I wanted was to put an end to the physical anguish that my heart, less stout than of old, could endure no longer. Then, by dint of accustoming myself to not wanting anything, whether it was a question of work or of anything else, I had become more cowardly. But above all, this anguish was incomparably keener for several reasons, the most important of which was perhaps not that I had never tasted any sensual pleasure with Mme de Guermantes or with Gilberte, but that, not seeing them every day, and at every hour of the day, having no opportunity and consequently no need to see them, there had been lacking, in my love for them, the immense force of Habit. Perhaps, now that my heart, incapable of willing and of enduring of its own free will what I was suffering, found only one possible solution, that Albertine should return at all costs, perhaps the opposite solution (a deliberate renunciation, gradual resignation) would have seemed to me a novelist’s solution, improbable in real life, had I not myself opted for it in the past when it concerned Gilberte. I knew therefore that this other solution might be accepted also and by the same man, for I had remained more or less the same. Only time had played its part, time that had made me older, time that moreover had kept Albertine perpetually in my company while we were living together. But at least, without my giving up the idea of that life, there survived in me of all that I had felt about

Gilberte the pride that made me refuse to be to Albertine a despicable plaything by begging her to return; I wanted her to come back without my appearing to attach any importance to her return. I got out of bed, so as not to lose more time, but was stopped by my anguish; this was the first time that I had gotten out of bed since Albertine had left me. Yet I must dress at once in order to go and make inquiries of her concierge.⁸

Suffering, the prolongation of a spiritual shock that has come from without, keeps aspiring to change its form; we hope to be able to dispel it by making plans, by seeking information; we want it to pass through its countless metamorphoses, for this requires less courage than retaining our suffering intact; the bed appears so narrow, hard, and cold on which we lie down with our grief. I put my feet to the ground; I stepped across the room with infinite precautions, took up a position from which I could not see Albertine's chair, the pianola upon the pedals of which she used to press her golden slippers, nor a single one of the things that she had used and all of which, in the secret language that my memory had taught them, seemed to be seeking to give me a translation, a different version, to announce to me for the second time the news of her departure. But even without looking at them I could see them, my strength left me, I sank down on one of those blue satin armchairs, the glossy surface of which an hour earlier, in the dimness of my bedroom anesthetized by a ray of morning light, had made me dream dreams that then I had passionately caressed, that were so far from me now. Alas, I had never sat on any of them until this minute except when Albertine was still with me. And so I could not remain sitting there, I rose; and thus, at every moment there was one more of those innumerable and humble "selves" that compose our personality which was still unaware of Albertine's departure and must be informed of it; I was obliged—and this was more cruel than if they had been strangers and had not borrowed my susceptibility to suffering—to announce to all these "selves" who did not yet know of it, the calamity that had just occurred; each of them in turn must hear for the first time the words: "Albertine has asked for her trunks"—those coffin-shaped trunks that I had seen put on the train at Balbec with my mother's.⁹ "Albertine has gone." To each of them I had to relate my grief, the grief that is in no way a pessimistic conclusion freely drawn from an accumulation of lamentable circumstances, but is the intermittent and involuntary revival of a specific impression, come to us from without and not chosen by us. There were some of these "selves" that

I had not encountered for a long time past. For example (I had not remembered that it was the day on which the barber called) the “self” that I was when I was having my hair cut. I had forgotten this “self,” and the barber’s arrival made me burst into tears, as, at a funeral, does the appearance of an old retired servant who has not forgotten the deceased. Then all of a sudden I remembered that, during the past week, I had from time to time been seized by panic fears that I had not confessed to myself. At those moments, however, I had debated the question, saying to myself: “Useless, of course, to consider the hypothesis of her suddenly leaving me. It is absurd. If I were to confide it to a sensible, intelligent man” (and I would have done so to secure peace of mind, had not jealousy prevented me from confiding in anyone) “he would be sure to say to me: ‘Why, you are mad. It is impossible.’” And, as a matter of fact, during these last days we had not quarreled once. “People leave for a reason. They tell you the reason. They give you a chance to reply. They do not run away like that. No, it is perfectly childish. It is the only hypothesis that is absurd.” And yet, every day, when I found that she was still there in the morning when I rang my bell, I had heaved a vast sigh of relief. And when Françoise handed me Albertine’s letter, I had at once been certain that it referred to the one thing that could not happen, to this departure that I had somehow perceived many days in advance, in spite of the logical reasons for my feeling reassured. I had said this to myself almost with satisfaction at my own perspicacity in my despair, like a murderer who knows that he cannot be detected, but is nevertheless afraid and all of a sudden sees his victim’s name written at the head of a document on the table of the prosecuting attorney who has sent for him. My only hope was that Albertine had gone to Touraine, to her aunt’s house where, after all, she would be under some sort of surveillance and could not do anything very serious before I brought her back. My worst fear was that she might be remaining in Paris, or have gone to Amsterdam or to Montjouvain, in other words that she had escaped in order to participate in some intrigue the preliminaries of which I had failed to observe. But in reality when I said to myself Paris, Amsterdam, Montjouvain, that is to say several places, I was thinking of places that were merely potential; and so, when Albertine’s concierge informed me that she had gone to Touraine, this place of residence that I had thought more desirable seemed to me the most terrible of them all, because it was real, and because, tormented for the first time by the certainty of the present and

the uncertainty of the future, I pictured Albertine starting a life that she had deliberately chosen apart from me, perhaps for a long time, perhaps forever, and in which she would realize that unknown element that had so often distressed me in the past when, nevertheless, I had enjoyed the happiness of possessing, of caressing what was its outer shell, that charming face impenetrable and captive. It was this unknown element that formed the core of my love.

Outside the door of Albertine's house I found a poor little girl who gazed at me with big eyes and looked so sweet-natured that I asked her whether she would care to come home with me, as I might have taken home a dog with faithful eyes. She seemed pleased by my suggestion. When I got home, I held her for some time on my knee, but very soon her presence, by making me feel too keenly Albertine's absence, became intolerable. And I asked her to go away, giving her first a five hundred-franc note. And yet, a moment later, the thought of having some other little girl in the house with me, of never being alone, without the comfort of an innocent presence, was the only thing that enabled me to endure the idea that Albertine might perhaps remain away for some time before returning. As for Albertine herself, she barely existed in me except under the form of her name, which, but for certain rare moments of respite when I awoke, came and engraved itself upon my brain and continued incessantly to do so. If I had thought aloud, I would have kept on repeating it, and my speech would have been as monotonous, as limited as if I had been transformed into a bird, a bird like that in the fable whose song repeated incessantly the name of her whom, when a man, it had loved. We say the name to ourselves, and as we remain silent it seems as though we are inscribing it on ourselves, as though it is leaving its trace on our brain, which must end by being, like a wall upon which somebody has amused himself by scribbling, entirely covered with the name, written a thousand times over, of her whom we love. We rewrite it all the time in our mind, even when we are happy, all the more when we are unhappy. And by repeating this name, which gives us nothing in addition to what we already know, we feel an incessantly renewed desire, but, in the course of time, it wearies us. To carnal pleasure I did not even give a thought at this moment; I did not even see, in my mind's eye, the image of that Albertine, albeit she had been the cause of such an upheaval of my being, I did not perceive her body and if I had tried to isolate the idea that was bound up—for there is always some idea bound up—with my

suffering, it would have been alternately, on the one hand my doubt as to the intention with which she had left me, with or without any thought of returning, and on the other hand the means of bringing her back. Perhaps there is something symbolical and true in the infinitesimal place occupied in our anxiety by the person who is its cause. The fact is that the person counts for little or nothing; what is almost everything is the series of emotions, of agonies that similar mishaps have made us feel in the past in connection with her and that habit has attached to her. What proves this clearly is (even more than the boredom that we feel in moments of happiness) that the fact of seeing or not seeing the person in question, of being or not being admired by her, of having or not having her at our disposal will seem to us utterly insignificant when we will no longer have to pose ourselves the problem (so pointless that we will no longer take the trouble to consider it) except in relation to the person herself—the series of emotions and agonies being forgotten, at least in so far as she is concerned, for it may have developed anew but transferred to another person. Before this, when it was still attached to her, we supposed that our happiness was dependent on her presence; it depended merely on the cessation of our anxiety. Our subconscious was therefore more clairvoyant than ourselves at that moment, when it made the figure of the beloved so minute, a figure that we had even perhaps forgotten, which we might have failed to remember clearly and thought mediocre, in the terrible drama in which finding her again in order to cease waiting for her might become a vital matter for us. Minuscule proportions of the woman's form, a logical and necessary effect of the fashion in which love develops, a clear allegory of the subjective nature of that love.

The spirit in which Albertine had left me was similar no doubt to that of nations who pave the way by a demonstration of their armed force for the exercise of their diplomacy. She could not have left me except in the hope of obtaining from me better terms, greater freedom, more luxury. In that case the one of us who would have prevailed would have been myself, had I had the strength to wait, to wait for the moment when, seeing that she could gain nothing, she would return of her own accord. But if at cards, or in war, where victory alone matters, we can hold out against a bluff, the conditions are not the same as those created by love and jealousy, not to mention suffering. If, in order to wait, to “hold out,” I allowed Albertine to remain away from me for several days, for several weeks perhaps, I was ruining

what had been my sole purpose for more than a year: never to leave her by herself for a single hour. All my precautions were rendered fruitless, if I allowed her the time, the opportunity to be unfaithful to me as often as she might choose, and if in the end she did return to me, I would never again be able to forget the time when she had been alone, and even if I won in the end, nevertheless in the past, that is to say irreparably, I would be the vanquished one.

As for the means of bringing Albertine back, they had all the more chance of success the more plausible the hypothesis appeared that she had left me only in the hope of being summoned back on more favorable terms. And no doubt to the people who did not believe in Albertine's sincerity, certainly to Françoise for example, this was the more plausible hypothesis. But my reason, to which the only explanation of certain bouts of ill humor, of certain attitudes had appeared, before I knew anything, to be that she had planned to leave for good, found it difficult to believe that, now that her departure had occurred, it was a mere feint. I say my reason, not myself. The hypothesis of a feint became all the more necessary to me the more improbable it was and gained in strength what it lost in probability. When we find ourselves on the brink of the abyss, and it seems as though God has forsaken us, we no longer hesitate to expect a miracle of him. I realize that in all this I was the most apathetic, albeit the most anxious of detectives. But Albertine's flight had not restored to me the faculties of which the habit of having her watched by other people had deprived me. I could think of one thing only: employing another person to search for her. This other person was Saint-Loup, who agreed. The transference of the anxiety of so many days to another person filled me with joy and I quivered with the certainty of success, my hands becoming suddenly dry again as in the past, and no longer moist with that sweat in which Françoise had soaked me when she said: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone." We remember that when I decided to live with Albertine, and even to marry her, it was in order to guard her, to know what she was doing, to prevent her from returning to her old habits with Mlle Vinteuil. It had been in the appalling anguish caused by her revelation at Balbec when she had told me, as a thing that was quite natural, and I succeeded, albeit it was the greatest sorrow that I had ever experienced in my life, in seeming to find quite natural, the thing that in my worst suppositions I had never had the audacity to imagine. (It is astonishing what a want of imagination jealousy, which spends its time in

weaving petty suppositions that are false, shows when it comes to discovering what is true.) Now this love, born first and foremost of a need to prevent Albertine from doing wrong, this love had preserved the traces of its origin. Being with her mattered little to me so long as I could prevent “this creature of flight,” from going to this place or to that. In order to prevent her, I had had recourse to the vigilance, to the company of the people who went about with her, and they had only to give me at the end of the day a report that was fairly reassuring for my anxieties to vanish in good humor.

Having given myself the assurance that, whatever steps I might have to take, Albertine would be back in the house that same evening, I had granted a respite to the pain that Françoise had caused me when she told me that Albertine had gone (because at that moment my mind taken by surprise had believed for an instant that her departure was final). But after an interruption, when with an impulse of its own independent life the initial pain revived spontaneously in me, it was just as keen as before, because it was anterior to the consoling promise that I had given myself to bring Albertine back that evening. This utterance, which would have calmed it, my pain had not heard. To set in motion the means of bringing about her return, once again, not that such an attitude on my part would ever have proved very successful, but because I had always adopted it since I had been in love with Albertine, I was condemned to behave as though I did not love her, was not pained by her departure, I was condemned to continue to lie to her. I could be all the more energetic in my efforts to bring her back in that personally I might appear to have given her up for good. I decided to write Albertine a farewell letter in which I would regard her departure as final, while I would send Saint-Loup down, as though without my knowledge, to put the most brutal pressure on Mme Bontemps to make Albertine return as soon as possible. No doubt I had experienced with Gilberte the danger of letters expressing an indifference that, feigned at first, ends by becoming genuine. And this experience ought to have restrained me from writing to Albertine letters of the same sort as those that I had written to Gilberte. But what we call experience is merely the revelation to our own eyes of a trait in our character that naturally reappears, and reappears all the more markedly because we have already brought it to light once of our own accord, so that the spontaneous impulse that guided us on the first occasion finds itself reinforced by all the

suggestions of memory. The human plagiarism that is most difficult to avoid for individuals (and even for nations that persevere in their faults and continue to aggravate them) is the plagiarism of ourselves.

Knowing that Saint-Loup was in Paris, I had sent for him immediately; he came at once, swift and efficient as he had been long ago at Doncières, and agreed to set off at once for Touraine. I suggested to him the following arrangement. He was to take the train to Châtellerault,¹⁰ find out where Mme Bontemps lived, and wait until Albertine had left the house, since there was a risk of her recognizing him. “But does the girl you are speaking of know me, then?” he asked. I told him that I did not think so. This plan of action filled me with indescribable joy. It was nevertheless diametrically opposed to my original intention: to arrange things so that I would not appear to be seeking Albertine’s return; whereas by so acting I must inevitably appear to be seeking it, but this plan had an inestimable advantage over “the proper thing to do” since it enabled me to say to myself that someone sent by me was going to see Albertine and would doubtless bring her back with him. And if I had been able to read my own heart clearly at the outset, I might have foreseen that it was this solution, hidden in the shadows and which I thought deplorable, that would ultimately prevail over the alternative course of patience that I had decided to choose, from lack of willpower. As Saint-Loup already appeared slightly surprised to learn that a girl had been living with me through the whole winter without my having said a word to him about her, as moreover he had often spoken to me of the girl who had been at Balbec and I had never said in reply: “But she is living here,” he might be offended by my lack of trust. There was always the risk of Mme Bontemps’s mentioning Balbec to him. But I was too impatient for his departure, for his arrival at the other end, to wish, to be able to think of the possible consequences of his journey. As for the risk of his recognizing Albertine (at whom he had resolutely refrained from looking when he had met her at Doncières), she had, as everyone admitted, so changed and put on weight that it was hardly likely. He asked me whether I had a picture of Albertine. I replied at first that I did not, so that he might not have a chance of recognizing Albertine from her photograph, taken about the time of our stay at Balbec, though he had had no more than a glimpse of her in the railway carriage. But then I remembered that in the photograph she would be already as different from the Albertine of Balbec as the living Albertine now was, and that he would

recognize her no better from her photograph than in the flesh. While I was looking for it, he laid his hand gently on my forehead, by way of consoling me. I was touched by the distress that the grief that he guessed me to be feeling was causing him. In the first place, however final his break with Rachel, what he had felt at that time was not yet so remote that he did not have a special sympathy, a special pity for this sort of suffering, as we feel ourselves more closely akin to a person who is afflicted with the same illness as ourselves. Besides, he had so strong an affection for me that the thought of my suffering was intolerable to him. And so he conceived, toward the one who was the cause of my suffering, a rancor mixed with admiration. He regarded me as so superior a being that he supposed that if I were to be so bound to another person she must be indeed extraordinary. I quite expected that he would think Albertine, in her photograph, pretty, but as at the same time I did not imagine that it would produce upon him the impression that Helen made upon the Trojan elders, as I continued to look for it, I said modestly: "Oh! you know, you mustn't get ideas into your head, for one thing it is a bad photograph, and besides there's nothing startling about her, she is not a beauty, she is merely very nice."

"Oh, but she must be wonderful," he said with a naïve, sincere enthusiasm as he sought to form a mental picture of the person who was capable of plunging me in such despair and agitation. "I am angry with her because she has hurt you, but at the same time one can't help seeing that a man who is an artist to his fingertips like you, that you, who love beauty in everything and with so passionate a love, were predestined to suffer more than the ordinary person when you found it in a woman."

At last I managed to find her photograph. "She is bound to be wonderful," still came from Robert, who had not seen that I was holding out the photograph to him. All at once he caught sight of it, he held it for a moment in his hands. His face expressed a stupefaction that amounted to stupidity. "Is this the girl you are in love with?" he said at length in a tone from which astonishment was tempered by his fear of making me angry. He made no comment, he had assumed the reasonable, prudent, inevitably somewhat disdainful air that we assume in front of a sick person—even if he has been in the past a man of outstanding gifts, and our friend—who is now nothing of the sort, for, raving mad, he speaks to us of a celestial being who has appeared to him, and continues to behold this being where we, the sane man, can see nothing but a quilt on the bed. I immediately understood

Robert's astonishment and that it was the same as the one in which the sight of his mistress had plunged me, the only difference being that I had recognized in her a woman whom I already knew, whereas he supposed that he had never seen Albertine. But no doubt the difference between our respective impressions of the same person was equally great. The time was long past when I had timidly begun at Balbec by adding to my visual sensations when I gazed at Albertine sensations of taste, of smell, of touch. Since then, other more profound, more pleasant, more indefinable sensations had been added to them, and afterward painful sensations. In short, Albertine was merely, like a stone around which snow has gathered, the generating center of an immense structure that rose above the plane of my heart. Robert, to whom all this stratification of sensations was invisible, grasped only a residue that the stratification prevented me, on the contrary, from perceiving. What had disconcerted Robert when his eyes fell upon Albertine's photograph was not the consternation of the Trojan elders when they saw Helen go by and said:

*Notre mal ne vaut pas un seul de ses regards,*¹¹

but exactly the opposite impression that may be expressed by: "What, it is for this that he has worked himself into such a state, has grieved himself so, has done so many idiotic things!" It must indeed be admitted that this sort of reaction at the sight of the person who has caused the suffering, upset the life, sometimes brought about the death of someone whom we love, is infinitely more frequent than that felt by the Trojan elders and is in fact habitual. This is not merely because love is individual, nor because, when we do not feel it, finding it avoidable and philosophizing upon the folly of other people come naturally to us. No, it is because, when it has reached the stage at which it causes such misery, the structure composed of the sensations interposed between the face of the woman and the eyes of her lover—the huge egg of pain that encases it and conceals it as a mantle of snow conceals a fountain—is already raised so high that the point at which the lover's gaze comes to rest, the point at which he finds his pleasure and his sufferings, is as far from the point that other people see as is the real sun from the place in which its condensed light enables us to see it in the sky. And what is more, during this time, beneath the chrysalis of griefs and tenderness that renders invisible to the lover the worst metamorphoses of the beloved object, her face has had time to grow old and to change. With

the result that if the face that the lover saw on the first occasion is very far removed from the one that he has seen since he has been in love and has been made to suffer, it is, in the opposite direction, equally far from the face that may now be seen by the indifferent onlooker. (What would have happened if, instead of the photograph of one who was still a girl, Robert had seen the photograph of an elderly mistress?) And indeed we have no need to see for the first time the woman who has caused such ravages, in order to feel this astonishment. Often we know her already, as my great-uncle knew Odette.¹² Then the optical difference extends not merely to physical appearance, but to the character, to the individual importance. It is more likely than not that the woman who is causing the man who is in love with her to suffer has always behaved perfectly toward someone who was not interested in her, just as Odette who was so cruel to Swann had been the considerate, attentive “lady in pink” to my great-uncle, or indeed that the person whose every decision is calculated in advance with as much dread as that of a deity by the man who is in love with her, appears as a person of no importance, only too glad to do anything that he may require of her, in the eyes of the man who is not in love with her, as Saint-Loup’s mistress appeared to me who saw in her nothing more than that “Rachel, when from the Lord” who had so repeatedly been offered me.¹³ I recalled my own stupefaction, that first time that I met her with Saint-Loup, at the thought that anybody could be tormented by not knowing what such a woman had been doing one evening, what she might have whispered to someone, why she had desired a separation. And I felt that all this past existence—but, in this case, Albertine’s—toward which every fiber of my heart, of my life was directed with a throbbing and heedless pain, must appear just as insignificant to Saint-Loup as it would one day, perhaps, appear to me; I felt that I would pass perhaps gradually, so far as the insignificance or gravity of Albertine’s past was concerned, from the state of mind in which I was at the moment to that of Saint-Loup, for I was under no illusion as to what Saint-Loup might be thinking, as to what anyone other than the lover himself might think. And I was not unduly distressed by this. Let us leave pretty women to men with no imagination. I recalled that tragic explanation of so many lives that is furnished by an inspired but not lifelike portrait, such as Elstir’s portrait of Odette,¹⁴ a portrait not so much of a mistress as of the distortions of love. All that it lacked was—what we find in so many

portraits—that the painter should have been both a great artist and a lover (and even then it was said that Elstir had been Odette’s lover). This disparity, the whole life of a lover—of a lover whose acts of folly nobody understands—the whole life of a Swann goes to prove. But let the lover be embodied in a painter like Elstir and then we have the clue to the enigma, we have at last before our eyes those lips that the common herd has never perceived, that nose that nobody has ever seen, that unsuspected allure. The portrait says: “What I have loved, what has made me suffer, what I have never ceased to behold is this.” By an inverse gymnastic, I who had made a mental effort to add to Rachel all that Saint-Loup had added to her of himself, I attempted to subtract the contribution of my heart and mind from the composition of Albertine and to picture her to myself as she must appear to Saint-Loup, as Rachel had appeared to me. Those differences, even though we were to observe them ourselves, what importance would we attach to them? When, in the summer at Balbec, Albertine used to wait for me beneath the arcades of Incarville and spring into my carriage, not only had she not yet “thickened,” she had, as a result of too much exercise, lost weight; thin, made plainer by an ugly hat that left visible only the tip of an ugly nose, and from a side-view, pale cheeks like white slugs, I recognized very little of her, enough however to know, when she sprang into the carriage, that it was she, that she had been punctual in keeping our rendezvous and had not gone somewhere else; and this was enough; what we love is too much in the past, consists too much in the time that we have spent together for us to require the whole woman; we wish only to be sure that it is she, not to be mistaken as to her identity, a thing far more important than beauty to those who are in love; her cheeks may grow hollow, her body thin, even to those who were originally proudest, in the eyes of others, of their domination over beauty, that little tip of a nose, that sign in which is summed up the permanent personality of a woman, that algebraical formula, that constant, is sufficient to prevent a man who is courted in the highest society, and who was fond of it, from being free on a single evening because he is spending his evenings in brushing and untangling, until it is time to go to bed, the hair of the woman whom he loves, or simply in staying by her side, so that he may be with her or she with him, or merely that she may not be with others.

“Are you sure,” Robert asked me, “that I can offer this woman thirty thousand francs just like that for her husband’s election committee?¹⁵ She is

as dishonest as all that? If you're right, three thousand francs would be enough."

"No, I beg of you, don't try to economize about a thing that matters so much to me. This is what you are to say to her, and it's to some extent true: 'My friend had borrowed these thirty thousand francs from a relative for the election expenses of the uncle of the girl he was engaged to marry. It was because of this engagement that the money was given him. And he asked me to bring it to you so that Albertine should know nothing about it. And now Albertine has left him. He doesn't know what to do. He is obliged to pay back the thirty thousand francs if he does not marry Albertine. And if he is going to marry her, then if only to keep up appearances she ought to return immediately, because it will make a very bad impression if she stays away for long.' You think I've made all this up on purpose?"

"Not at all," Saint-Loup assured me out of consideration for myself, out of discretion, and also because he knew that circumstances are often stranger than one supposes. After all, it was by no means impossible that in this tale of the thirty thousand francs there might be, as I had told him, a large element of truth. It was possible, but it was not true, and this element of truth was in fact a lie. But we lied to each other, Robert and I, as in every conversation when one friend is genuinely anxious to help another who is desperately in love. The friend who is being counselor, prop, comforter, may pity the other's distress but cannot share it, and the kinder he is to him the more he lies. And the other confesses to him as much as is necessary in order to secure his help but conceals many things from him. And the happy one of the two is, when all is said and done, he who takes trouble, goes on a journey, fulfills a mission, but feels no anguish in his heart. I was at this moment the person that Robert had been at Doncières when he thought that Rachel had abandoned him.

"Very well, just as you like; if I get a snub, I accept it in advance for your sake. And even if it does seem a bit strange to make such an open bargain, I know that in our own set there are plenty of duchesses, even the most sanctimonious of them, who if you offered them thirty thousand francs would do things far more difficult than telling their nieces not to stay in Touraine. Anyhow I am doubly glad to be doing you a service, since that is the only reason that will make you consent to see me. If I marry," he went on, "don't you think we might see more of one another, won't you look upon my house as your own? . . ." He stopped short, the thought having

suddenly occurred to him (as I supposed at the time) that, if I too were to marry, Albertine might not be a suitable friend of his wife. And I remembered what the Cambremers had said to me about the probability of his marrying a niece of the Prince de Guermantes.

He consulted the timetable and saw that he could not leave Paris until the evening. Françoise inquired: "Am I to take Mlle Albertine's bed out of the study?" "Not at all," I said, "you must leave everything ready for her." I hoped that she would return any day and did not want Françoise to suppose that there could be any doubt of her return. Albertine's departure must appear to have been arranged between ourselves, and not in any way to imply that she loved me less than before. But Françoise looked at me with an air, if not of incredulity, at any rate of doubt. She too had her alternative hypotheses. Her nostrils flared, she could scent the quarrel, she must have felt it in the air for a long time past. And if she was not absolutely sure of it, this was perhaps only because, like me, she hesitated to believe unconditionally what would have given her too much pleasure. Now the burden of the affair rested no longer on my overwrought mind, but on Saint-Loup. I became quite light-hearted because I had made a decision, because I could say to myself: "I haven't lost any time, I have acted."

Saint-Loup can barely have been in the train when in my hall I ran into Bloch, whose ring I had not heard, and so was obliged to let him stay with me for a moment. He had met me recently with Albertine (whom he had known at Balbec) on a day when she was in a bad mood. "I dined with M. Bontemps," he told me, "and since I have a certain influence over him, I told him that I was sorry that his niece was not nicer to you, that he must make entreaties to her in that connection." I choked with rage; these entreaties and complaints destroyed the whole effect of Saint-Loup's intervention and brought me into direct contact with Albertine herself whom I now seemed to be imploring to return. To make matters worse, Françoise, who was lingering in the hall, could hear every word. I heaped every imaginable reproach upon Bloch, telling him that I had never authorized him to do anything of the sort and that, besides, the whole thing was nonsense. Bloch, from that moment, continued to smile, less, I imagine, from joy than from embarrassment at having made me angry. He laughingly expressed his surprise at having provoked such anger. Perhaps he said this hoping to minimize in my mind the importance of his indiscreet intervention, perhaps it was because he was of a cowardly nature and lived

happily and idly in an atmosphere of falsehood, as jellyfish float upon the surface of the sea, perhaps because, even if he had been of a different race, since other people can never see things from our point of view, they do not realize the magnitude of the injury that words uttered at random can do us. I had barely shown him out, unable to think of any remedy for the mischief that he had done, when the bell rang again, and Françoise brought me a summons from the head of the Sûreté.¹⁶ The parents of the little girl whom I had brought into the house for an hour had decided to lodge a complaint against me for corruption of a child under the age of consent. There are moments in life when a sort of beauty is born of the multiplicity of the troubles that assail us, intertwined like Wagnerian leitmotifs, from the notion also, which then emerges, that events are not situated in the content of the reflections portrayed in the wretched little mirror that the mind holds in front of it and that is called the future, that they are somewhere outside, and spring up as suddenly as a person who comes to catch us in flagrante delicto. Even when left to itself, an event becomes modified, whether failure amplifies it for us, or satisfaction reduces it. But it is rarely unaccompanied. The feelings aroused by each event contradict one another, and there comes to a certain extent, as I felt when on my way to the head of the Sûreté, an at least momentary revulsion that is as provocative of sentimental misery as fear. I found at the Sûreté the girl's parents, who insulted me by saying: "We don't eat that sort of bread," and handed me back the five hundred francs that I declined to take, and the head of the Sûreté who, setting himself the inimitable example of the judicial facility in repartee, seized hold of a word in each sentence that I uttered, a word that enabled him to make a witty and crushing retort. My innocence of the alleged crime was never taken into consideration, for that was the sole hypothesis that no one was willing to accept for an instant. Nevertheless, the difficulty of proving the charge enabled me to escape with an extremely violent reprimand for as long as the parents were in the room. But as soon as they had gone, the head of the Sûreté, who had a weakness for little girls, changed his tone and admonished me as one man to another: "Next time, you must be more careful. Good Lord, you can't pick them up as easily as that, or you'll get into trouble. Anyhow, you can find dozens of girls better than that one, and far cheaper. It was a perfectly ridiculous amount to pay." I felt him to be so incapable of understanding me if I attempted to tell him the truth that without saying a word I took advantage of his permission to

withdraw. Every passerby, until I was safely at home, seemed to me an inspector appointed to spy on my every movement. But this leitmotif, like that of my anger with Bloch, died away, leaving the field clear for that of Albertine's departure. And the latter resumed, but in an almost joyful mode now that Saint-Loup had departed. Now that he had undertaken to go and see Mme Bontemps, my sufferings had been dispelled. I believed that this was because I had acted, I believed it sincerely, for we never know what we conceal in our heart of hearts. What really made me happy was not, as I supposed, that I had transferred my indecisions to Saint-Loup. I was not, for that matter, entirely wrong; the specific remedy for an unfortunate event (and three events out of four are unfortunate) is a decision; for it has the effect, by a sudden reversal of our thoughts, of interrupting the flow of those that come from the past event and prolong its vibration, and breaking it with a contrary flow of contrary thoughts, come from without, from the future. But these new thoughts are most of all beneficial to us when (and this was the case with the thoughts that assailed me at this moment), from the heart of that future, it is hope that they bring us. What really made me so happy was the secret certainty that Saint-Loup's mission could not fail, Albertine was bound to return. I realized this; for not having received, on the following day, any answer from Saint-Loup, I began to suffer anew. My decision, my transference to him of full power of action, were not therefore the cause of my joy, which, in that case, would have persisted, but rather the "Success is certain" that had been in my mind when I said: "Come what may." And the thought aroused by his delay, that, after all, his mission might not prove successful, was so odious to me that I had lost my gaiety. It is in reality our anticipation, our hope of happy events that fills us with a joy that we ascribe to other causes and that ceases, letting us relapse into misery, if we are no longer so assured that what we desire will come to pass. It is always this invisible belief that sustains the edifice of our sensory world, deprived of which it totters. We have seen that it created for us the merit or unimportance of other people, our excitement or boredom at seeing them. It creates similarly the possibility of enduring a grief that seems to us trivial, simply because we are convinced that it will presently be brought to an end, or its sudden enlargement until the presence of a certain person matters as much as, sometimes even more than, our life itself. One thing however succeeded in making my heartache as acute as it had been at the first moment and (I am bound to admit) no longer was. This was when I

reread a sentence in Albertine's letter. However much we love people, the pain of losing them, when in our isolation we are confronted with it alone, to which our mind gives, to a certain extent, whatever form it chooses, this pain is endurable and different from that other pain less human, less our own, as unforeseen and unusual as an accident in the moral world and in the region of our heart, which is caused not so much by the people themselves as by the manner in which we have learned that we are never to see them again. Albertine, I might think of her while gently weeping, accepting the fact that I would not be able to see her again this evening any more than I had seen her yesterday, but when I read again: "my decision is irrevocable," that was another matter, it was like taking a dangerous drug that might give me a heart attack that I could not survive. There is in inanimate objects, in events, in farewell letters, a special danger that amplifies and alters the very nature of the grief that people are capable of causing us. But this pain did not last long. I was, when all was said and done, so sure of Saint-Loup's skill, of his eventual success, Albertine's return seemed to me so certain that I asked myself whether I had been right to hope for it. Nevertheless, I rejoiced at the thought. Unfortunately, for me, who supposed the business with the Sûreté to be over and done with, Françoise came in to tell me that an inspector had called to inquire whether I was in the habit of having girls in the house, that the concierge, supposing him to refer to Albertine, had replied in the affirmative, and that from that moment it had seemed that the house was being watched. Thenceforth it would be impossible for me ever to bring a little girl into the house to console me in my grief, without risking the shame in her presence of an inspector suddenly appearing and of her taking me for a criminal. And at the same instant I realized how far more we live for certain ideas than we suppose, for this impossibility of my ever taking a little girl on my knee again seemed to me to take away all the value of my life, but what was more, I understood how comprehensible it is that people will readily refuse wealth and risk their lives, whereas we imagine that pecuniary interest and the fear of death rule the world. For if I had thought that even a little girl who was a complete stranger might be given a shameful impression of me by the arrival of a policeman, how much more readily would I have killed myself! And yet there was no possible comparison between the two degrees of suffering. Yet in everyday life people never bear in mind that those to whom they offer money, whom they threaten to kill, may have mistresses or merely friends, whose esteem they

value even if they do not value their own. But, all of a sudden, by a confusion of which I was not aware (I did not in fact remember that Albertine, being of age, was free to live under my roof and even to be my mistress), it seemed to me that the charge of corrupting minors might apply also to Albertine. There-upon my life appeared to me to be hedged in on every side. And when I thought that I had not lived chastely with her, I found in the punishment that had been inflicted upon me for having held an unknown little girl on my knee, the relation that almost always exists in human sanctions, the effect of which is that there is hardly ever either a just sentence or a judicial error, but a sort of compromise between the false idea that the judge forms of an innocent action and the culpable deeds of which he is unaware. But then when I thought that Albertine's return might involve me in a slanderous conviction that would degrade me in her eyes and would perhaps do her, too, an injury for which she would not forgive me, I ceased to look forward to her return, it terrified me. I would have liked to telegraph to her not to come back. And immediately, drowning everything else, the passionate desire for her return overwhelmed me. The fact was that having for a moment considered the possibility of telling her not to return and of living without her, all of a sudden I felt myself on the contrary ready to abandon all travel, all pleasure, all work, if only Albertine might return! Ah, how my love for Albertine, the course of which I had supposed that I could foretell on the basis of my earlier love for Gilberte, had developed in an entirely opposite direction! How impossible it was for me to live without seeing her! And with each of my actions, even the most trivial, since they had all been steeped before in the blissful atmosphere that was Albertine's presence, I was obliged in turn, at new costs, with the same pain, to begin again the apprenticeship of separation. Then the competition of other forms of life thrust this new pain into the background, and during those days that were the first days of spring, I even found, as I waited until Saint-Loup had seen Mme Bontemps, in imagining Venice and beautiful, unknown women, a few moments of agreeable calm. As soon as I was conscious of this, I felt within me a panic terror. This calm that I had just enjoyed was the first apparition of that great intermittent force that was to wage war in me against pain, against love, and would in the end prove victorious. This state of which I had just had a foretaste and had received the warning, was for a moment only what would in time to come be my permanent state, a life in which I would no longer be able to suffer on

account of Albertine, in which I would no longer be in love with her. And my love, which had just seen and recognized the one enemy by whom it could be conquered, forgetfulness, began to tremble, like a lion which in the cage in which it has been confined has suddenly caught sight of the python that will devour it.

I thought of Albertine all the time, and Françoise, when she came into my room, was never quick enough in saying: "There are no letters," to curtail my anguish. From time to time I succeeded, by letting some current or other of ideas flow through my grief, in refreshing, in airing to some slight extent the vitiated atmosphere of my heart. But at night, if I succeeded in going to sleep, then it was as though the memory of Albertine had been the drug that had procured my sleep, whereas the cessation of its influence would awaken me. I thought all the time of Albertine while I was asleep. It was a special sleep of her own that she gave me, and one in which, moreover, I would no longer have been at liberty, as when awake, to think of other things. Sleep and the memory of her were the two substances that I must mix together and take at one draft in order to sleep. When I was awake, moreover, my suffering went on increasing day by day instead of diminishing. Not that oblivion was not performing its task, but because by that very fact it favored the idealization of the regretted image and thereby the assimilation of my initial suffering to other analogous sufferings that intensified it. Still this image was endurable. But if all of a sudden I thought of her room, of her room in which the bed stood empty, of her piano, her automobile, I lost all my strength, I shut my eyes, let my head droop on my shoulder like a person who is about to faint. The sound of doors being opened hurt me almost as much because it was not she who was opening them.

When it was possible that a telegram might have come from Saint-Loup, I dared not ask: "Is there a telegram?" At length one did come but brought with it only a postponement of any result, with the message: "The ladies have gone away for three days." No doubt, if I had endured the four days that had already elapsed since her departure, it was because I said to myself: "It is only a matter of time, by the end of the week she will be here." But this reasoning did not alter the fact that for my heart, for my body, the action to be performed was the same: living without her, returning home and not finding her in the house, passing the door of her room—as for opening it, I had not yet the courage to do that—knowing that she was not

inside, going to bed without having said goodnight to her, such were the tasks that my heart had been obliged to accomplish in their terrible entirety, and for all the world as though I had not been going to see Albertine again. But the fact that my heart had already performed this daily task four times proved that it was now capable of continuing to perform it. And soon, perhaps, the consideration that was helping me thus to go on living—the prospect of Albertine’s return—would cease to be necessary to me (I would be able to say to myself: “She is never coming back,” and go on living all the same as I had already been living for the last four days), like a cripple who has recovered the use of his legs and can dispense with his crutches. No doubt when I came home at night I still found, taking my breath away, suffocating me in the vacuum of solitude, the memories placed end to end in an interminable series of all the evenings on which Albertine had been waiting for me; but already I found in this series my memory of last night, of the night before and of the two previous nights, that is to say the memory of the four nights that had passed since Albertine’s departure, during which I had remained without her, alone, through which nevertheless I had lived, four nights already forming a string of memories that was very slender compared with the other, but to which every new day would perhaps add substance. I will say nothing of the letter conveying a declaration of affection that I received at this time from a niece of Mme de Guermantes, considered the prettiest girl in Paris, nor of the overtures made to me by the Duc de Guermantes on behalf of her parents, resigned, in their anxiety to secure their daughter’s happiness, to the inequality of the match, to an apparent misalliance. Such incidents that might prove gratifying to our self-esteem are too painful when we are in love. We might have the desire but not the indelicacy of communicating them to her who has a less flattering opinion of us, an opinion that moreover would not be altered by the knowledge that we are capable of inspiring one that is very different. What the duke’s niece wrote to me could only have annoyed Albertine.

From the moment of waking, when I picked my grief up again at the point where I had left it before going to sleep, like a book that had been shut for a while but that I would keep before my eyes until night, it was invariably to some thought concerning Albertine that I related every sensation, whether it came to me from without or from within. The bell rang: it is a letter from her, it is she herself perhaps! If I felt better, not too miserable, I was no longer jealous, I no longer had any grievance against

her, I would have liked to see her at once, to kiss her, to live happily with her ever after. The act of telegraphing to her: “Come at once” seemed to me to have become a perfectly simple thing, as though my new mood had changed not merely my dispositions but things external to myself, had made them easier. If I was in a somber mood, all my anger with her revived, I no longer felt any desire to kiss her, I felt how impossible it was that she could ever make me happy, I sought only to harm her and to prevent her from belonging to other people. But these two opposite moods had an identical result: it was essential that she should return as soon as possible. And yet, whatever joy I might feel at the moment of her return, I sensed that very soon the same difficulties would recur and that to seek happiness in the satisfaction of an emotional desire was as naïve as to attempt to reach the horizon by walking straight ahead. The farther the desire advances, the farther does true possession withdraw. So that if happiness or at least the absence of suffering can be found, it is not the satisfaction, but the gradual reduction, the eventual extinction of our desire that we must seek. We attempt to see the person whom we love, we ought to attempt not to see her, oblivion alone brings about an ultimate extinction of desire. And I imagine that if an author were to publish truths of this sort, he would dedicate the book that contained them to a woman to whom he would thus take pleasure in returning, saying to her: “This book is yours.” And thus, while telling the truth in his book, he would be lying in his dedication, for he will attach to the book’s being hers only the importance that he attaches to the stone that came to him from her and that will remain precious to him only so long as he is in love with her.¹⁷ The bonds that unite another person to ourselves exist only in our mind. Memory as it grows fainter loosens them, and notwithstanding the illusion by which we would like to be duped and with which, out of love, friendship, politeness, deference, duty, we dupe other people, we exist alone. Man is the creature who cannot escape from himself, who knows other people only in himself, and when he asserts the contrary, he is lying. And I would have been so afraid (had there been anyone capable of doing it) of somebody’s robbing me of this need of her, this love for her, that I convinced myself that it was something precious in my life. To be able to hear uttered, without being either charmed or pained by them, the names of the stations through which the train passed on its way to Touraine would have seemed to me a diminution of myself (for no other reason really than that it would have proved that I was becoming indifferent

to Albertine); it was just as well, I told myself, that by incessantly asking myself what she could be doing, thinking, wanting, at every moment, whether she intended, whether she was going to return, I should keep open the communicating door that love had opened up in me, and feel another person's life flooding through open sluices to fill the reservoir that must not once again become stagnant. Presently, as Saint-Loup remained silent, a subordinate anxiety—my expectation of a further telegram, of a telephone call from him—masked the first, my uncertainty as to the result, whether Albertine was going to return. Listening for every sound in expectation of the telegram became so intolerable that I felt, whatever its contents might be, the arrival of the telegram, which was the only thing of which I could think at the moment, would put an end to my sufferings. But when at last I had received a telegram from Robert in which he informed me that he had seen Mme Bontemps, but that in spite of all his precautions, Albertine had seen him, and that this had upset everything, I burst out in a torrent of fury and despair, for this was what I had wanted first and foremost to avoid. Once it came to Albertine's knowledge, Saint-Loup's mission gave me an appearance of being dependent on her which could only dissuade her from returning, my horror of which was, moreover, all that I had retained of the pride that my love had boasted in Gilberte's day and had since lost. I cursed Robert. Then I told myself that, if this attempt had failed, I would try another. Since man is able to influence the outer world, how, if I brought into play cunning, intelligence, pecuniary advantage, affection, could I fail to succeed in destroying this appalling fact: Albertine's absence? We believe that according to our desire we are able to change the things around about us, we believe this because otherwise we can see no favorable solution. We forget the solution that generally comes to pass and is also favorable: we do not succeed in changing things according to our desire, but gradually our desire changes. The situation that we hoped to change because it was intolerable becomes unimportant to us. We have not managed to surmount the obstacle, as we were absolutely determined to do, but life has taken us around it, led us past it, and then if we turn around to gaze at the remote past, we can barely catch sight of it, so imperceptible has it become. From the floor above ours, I could hear one of the neighbors playing songs from *Manon*.¹⁸ I applied their words, which I knew, to Albertine and myself, and was stirred by so profound a sentiment that I began to cry. The words were:

Hélas, l'oiseau qui fuit ce qu'il croit l'esclavage,

*Le plus souvent la nuit d'un vol désespéré revient battre au vitrage!*¹⁹

and the death of Manon:

"Manon, réponds-moi donc!"

"Seul amour de mon âme,

*Je n'ai su qu'aujourd'hui la bonté de ton coeur . . ."*²⁰

Since Manon returned to Des Grieux, it seemed to me that I was to Albertine the one and only love of her life. Alas, it is probable that, if she had been listening at that moment to the same song, it would not have been me that she would have cherished under the name of Des Grieux, and, even if the idea had occurred to her, the memory of me would have prevented her from being moved on hearing this music, which although better written and more distinguished, belonged to the type of music that she admired.²¹

As for me, I did not have the heart to abandon myself to so pleasant a train of thought, to imagine Albertine calling me her "soul's only love" and realizing that she had been mistaken over what she "had thought to be bondage." I knew that we can never read a novel without giving its heroine the form and features of the woman with whom we are in love. But however happy the book's ending may be, our love has not advanced an inch and, when we have shut the book, she whom we love and who has come to us at last in its pages, loves us no better in real life. In a fit of fury, I telegraphed Saint-Loup to return as quickly as possible to Paris, in order to avoid at least the appearance of an aggravating insistence on a mission that I had been so anxious to keep secret. But even before he had returned in obedience to my instructions, it was from Albertine herself that I received the following telegram:

MY DEAR, YOU HAVE SENT YOUR FRIEND SAINT-LOUP TO MY AUNT, WHICH WAS FOOLISH. MY DEAR FRIEND, IF YOU NEEDED ME WHY DID YOU NOT WRITE TO ME DIRECTLY? I WOULD HAVE BEEN ONLY TOO HAPPY TO COME BACK; DO NOT LET US HAVE ANY MORE OF THESE ABSURD ENDEAVORS.

"I would have been only too happy to come back!" If she said this, it must mean that she regretted her departure, and was only seeking an excuse to return. So that I had merely to do what she said, to write to her that I needed her, and she would return. I was going, then, to see her again, her, the Albertine of Balbec (for since her departure this was what she had once more become to me; like a seashell to which we cease to pay any attention

while we have it on our chest of drawers, once we have parted with it, either by giving it away or by losing it, and begin to think about it, a thing that we had ceased to do, she recalled to me all the joyous beauty of the blue mountains of the sea). And it was not only she who had become a creature of the imagination, that is to say desirable, life with her had become an imaginary life, that is to say, a life set free from all difficulties, so that I said to myself: "How happy we are going to be!" But now that I was assured of her return, I must not appear to be seeking to hasten it, but must on the contrary efface the bad impression left by Saint-Loup's intervention, which I could always disavow later on by saying that he had acted upon his own initiative, because he had always been in favor of our marriage.

Meanwhile, I read her letter again, and was nevertheless disappointed when I saw how little there is of a person in a letter. Doubtless the characters traced on the paper express our thoughts, as do also our features: it is still a thought of some kind that we see before us. But all the same, in the person, the thought is not apparent to us until it has been diffused through the corolla of the face blooming like a water lily. This modifies it considerably. And it is perhaps one of the causes of our perpetual disappointments in love, this perpetual deviation that brings it about that, in response to our expectation of the ideal person with whom we are in love, each meeting provides us with a person in flesh and blood in whom there is already so little trace of our dream. And then when we demand something of this person, we receive from her a letter in which even of the person very little remains, as in the letters of an algebraical formula there no longer remains the precise value of the arithmetical ciphers, which themselves do not contain the qualities of the fruit or flowers that they enumerate. And yet love, the beloved, her letters, are perhaps nevertheless translations (unsatisfying as it may be to pass from one to the other) of the same reality, since the letter seems to us inadequate only while we are reading it, but we have been sweating blood until its arrival, and it is sufficient to calm our anguish, if not to appease, with its tiny black symbols, our desire that knows that it contains after all only the equivalent of a word, a smile, a kiss, not those things themselves.

I wrote to Albertine:

"My dear, I was just about to write to you, and I thank you for telling me that if I had been in need of you you would have come at once; it is like you

to have so exalted a sense of devotion to an old friend, which can only increase my regard for you. But no, I did not ask and I will not ask you to return; seeing each other again—for a long time to come—might not be painful, perhaps, to you, a heartless girl. To me, whom at times you have thought so cold, it would be most painful. Life has driven us apart. You have made a decision that I consider very wise, and that you have made at the right moment, with a marvelous presentiment, for you left me on the day on which I had just received my mother's consent to my asking for your hand. I would have told you this when I awoke, when I received her letter (at the same moment as yours). Perhaps you would have been afraid of distressing me by leaving immediately after that. And we would perhaps have united our lives in what would have been for us (who knows?) unhappiness. If this is what was in store for us, then I bless you for your wisdom. We would lose all the fruit of it were we to meet again. This is not to say that I would not find it a temptation. But I claim no great credit for resisting it. You know what an inconstant person I am and how quickly I forget. You have told me often, I am first and foremost a man of habit. Therefore, I am not greatly to be pitied. The habits that I am beginning to form in your absence are not as yet very strong. Naturally, at this moment, the habits that I had when you were with me, habits that your departure has disrupted, are still the stronger. They will not remain so for very long. For that reason, indeed, I had thought of taking advantage of these last few days in which our meeting would not yet be for me what it will be in two week's time, perhaps even sooner (forgive my frankness): an inconvenience—I had thought of taking advantage of them, before the final oblivion, in order to settle certain little material questions with you, in which you might, as a good and charming friend, have rendered a service to the one who for five minutes imagined himself your fiancé. Since I never doubted my mother's approval, and since moreover I desired that we should each enjoy all that liberty of which you had too generously and abundantly made a sacrifice which was acceptable for a few weeks' living together, but would have become as odious to you as to me now that we were to spend the rest of our lives together (it almost pains me to think as I write to you that this nearly happened, that we came within a few seconds of it), I had thought of organizing our existence in the most independent manner possible, and, to begin with, I wished you to have that yacht in which you could go cruising while I, not being well enough to accompany you, would wait for you at the

port; I had written to Elstir to ask for his advice, since you admire his taste. And on land I wished you to have an automobile to yourself, for your very own, in which you could go out, could travel wherever you chose. The yacht was almost ready; it is named, after a wish that you expressed at Balbec, the *Cygne*.²² And remembering that your favorite make of car was the Rolls-Royce, I had ordered one. But now that we are never to meet again, as I have no hope of persuading you to accept either the boat or the car (to me they would be quite useless), I had thought—since I had ordered them through an agent, but in your name—that you might perhaps by countermanding them yourself save me the expense of the yacht and the car that are no longer required. But this, and many other matters, would have needed to be discussed. And I find that so long as I am capable of falling in love with you again, which will not be for long, it would be madness, for the sake of a sailing vessel and a Rolls-Royce, to meet again and to risk the happiness of your life since you have decided that it lies in your living apart from me. No, I prefer to keep the Rolls and even the yacht. And since I will make no use of them and they are likely to remain forever, one in its dock, dismantled, the other in its garage, I will have engraved upon the yacht (Mon Dieu, I am afraid of misnaming the part and committing a heresy that would shock you) those lines of Mallarmé that you used to like:

*Un cygne d'autrefois se souvient que c'est lui
Magnifique mais qui sans espoir se délivre
Pour n'avoir pas chanté la région où vivre
Quand du stérile hiver a resplendi l'ennui.*²³

You remember—it is the poem that begins:²⁴ “Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd’hui . . .”²⁵ Alas, today is no longer either virginal or beautiful. But those who, like me, know that they will very soon make of it an endurable “tomorrow” are seldom endurable themselves. As for the Rolls, it would deserve rather those other lines of the same poet that you said you could not understand:

*Dis si je ne suis pas joyeux
Tonnerre et rubis aux moyeux
De voir en l'air que ce feu troue
Avec des royaumes épars
Comme mourir pourpre la roue
Du seul vespéral de mes chars.*²⁶

“Farewell forever, my little Albertine, and thank you once again for the charming drive that we took on the eve of our parting. I retain a very pleasant memory of it.

P.S. I make no reference to what you tell me of the alleged suggestions that Saint-Loup (whom I do not for a moment believe to be in Touraine) may have made to your aunt. It’s like a Sherlock Holmes story. What do you take me for?”

No doubt, just as I had said in the past to Albertine: “I am not in love with you,” in order that she might love me, “I forget people when I do not see them,” in order that she might come often to see me, “I have decided to leave you,” in order to forestall any idea of a separation, now it was because I was absolutely determined that she must return within a week that I said to her: “Farewell forever”; it was because I wanted to see her again that I said to her: “I think it would be dangerous to see you”; it was because living apart from her seemed to me worse than death that I wrote to her: “You were right, we would be unhappy together.” Alas, this false letter, when I wrote it in order to appear not to need her (the only remnant of pride from my former love for Gilberte in my love for Albertine), and also to enjoy the pleasure of saying certain things that could only move me and not her, I ought to have foreseen from the start that it was possible that it would result in a negative response, that is to say one that confirmed what I had said; that this was indeed probable, for even had Albertine been less intelligent than she was, she would never have doubted for an instant that what I said to her was untrue. Indeed, without pausing to consider the intentions that I expressed in this letter, the mere fact of my writing it, even if it had not been preceded by Saint-Loup’s intervention, was enough to prove to her that I desired her return and to prompt her to let me become more and more inextricably ensnared. Then, having foreseen the possibility of a reply in the negative, I ought also to have foreseen that this reply would at once revive in its fullest intensity my love for Albertine. And I ought, still before posting my letter, to have asked myself whether, in the event of Albertine’s replying in the same tone and refusing to return, I would have sufficient control over my grief to force myself to remain silent, not to telegraph to her: “Come back,” not to send her some other emissary, which, after I had written to her that we would never meet again, would make it perfectly obvious that I could not do without her, and would lead to her refusing

more emphatically than ever, whereupon I, unable to endure my anguish for another moment, would go down to see her and might, for all I knew, be refused admission. And, no doubt, this would have been, after three enormous blunders, the worst of all, after which there would be nothing left but to kill myself in front of her house. But the disastrous manner in which the psychopathic universe is constructed has decreed that the clumsy act, the act that we ought above all to avoid, is precisely the action that will calm us, the action that, opening before us, until we learn its result, new avenues of hope, relieves us momentarily of the intolerable pain that a refusal has aroused in us. With the result that, when the pain is too intense, we dash headlong into the blunder that consists in writing, sending somebody to intercede, going in person, proving that we cannot do without the woman we love.

But I foresaw nothing of all this. The probable result of my letter seemed to me on the contrary to be that of making Albertine return to me at once. And so, as I thought of this result, I greatly enjoyed writing the letter. But at the same time I had not ceased, while writing it, from shedding tears; partly, at first, in the same way as on the day when I had feigned a pretense of separation, because, as the words represented for me the idea that they expressed to me, although they were aimed in the opposite direction (uttered mendaciously because my pride forbade me to admit that I was in love), they carried their own load of sorrow, but also because I felt that the idea contained a grain of truth.

As this letter seemed to me to be certain of its effect, I began to regret that I had sent it. For as I pictured to myself the return (so natural, after all) of Albertine, suddenly all the reasons that made our marriage a bad thing for me returned in their fullest force. I hoped that she would refuse to come back. I was calculating that my liberty, my whole future depended upon her refusal, that I had been mad to write to her, that I ought to have retrieved my letter that, alas, had gone, when Françoise, with the newspaper that she had just brought upstairs, handed it back to me. She was not certain how many stamps it required. But immediately I changed my mind; I hoped that Albertine would not return, but I wanted the decision to come from her, so as to put an end to my anxiety, and I handed the letter back to Françoise. I opened the newspaper; it announced Berma's death.²⁷ Then I remembered the two different ways in which I had listened to *Phèdre*, and it was now in a third way that I thought of the declaration scene. It seemed to me that

what I had so often recited to myself, and had heard in the theater, was the statement of the laws that I was to experience in my life. There are in our soul things to which we do not realize how strongly we are attached. Or else, if we live without them, it is because we put off from day to day, from fear of failure, or of being made to suffer, entering into possession of them. This was what had happened to me in the case of Gilberte when I thought that I had given her up. If before the moment in which we are entirely detached from these things—a moment long subsequent to that in which we believe ourselves to have been detached from them—the girl with whom we are in love becomes, for example, engaged to someone else, we go crazy, we can no longer endure the life that appeared to us to be so sorrowfully calm. Or else, if the thing is already in our possession, we feel that it is a burden, we would gladly be rid of it; this was what had happened to me in the case of Albertine. But let a sudden departure remove the unloved person from us, we are unable to survive. Now, did not the “argument” of *Phèdre* combine these two cases? Hippolyte is about to leave. Phèdre, who until then has taken care to court his hostility, from a scruple of conscience, she says, or rather the poet makes her say, because she is unable to see what she might achieve and feels that she is not loved, Phèdre can endure the situation no longer. She comes to him to confess her love, and this was the scene that I had so often recited to myself:²⁸

*On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous.*²⁹

Doubtless the reason concerning Hippolyte's departure is secondary, we may suppose, compared to the death of Thésée. And similarly when, a few lines farther on, Phèdre pretends for a moment that she has been misunderstood:

*Aurais-je perdu tout le soin de ma gloire?*³⁰

we may suppose that it is because Hippolyte has repulsed her declaration.

Madame, oubliez-vous

*Que Thésée est mon père, et qu'il est votre époux?*³¹

But if he had not shown this indignation, Phèdre, her happiness attained, might have had the same feeling that it did not amount to much. Whereas, as soon as she sees that it is not to be attained, that Hippolyte thinks that he has misunderstood her and makes apologies, then, like myself when I

decided to give my letter back to Françoise, she decides that the refusal must come from him, decides to stake everything on his reaction:

*Ah! cruel, tu m'as trop entendue.*³²

And there is nothing, not even the harshness with which, as I had been told, Swann had treated Odette, or I myself had treated Albertine, a harshness that substituted for the original love a new love composed of pity, tenderness, of the need of effusion, which is only a variant of the former love, that is not to be found also in this scene:

Tu me haïssais plus, je ne t'aimais pas moins.

*Tes malheurs te prêtaient encor de nouveaux charmes.*³³

What proves that it is not to the “thought of her own good name” to which Phèdre attaches most importance is that she would forgive Hippolyte and turn a deaf ear to the advice of C  none had she not learned at the same instant that Hippolyte was in love with Aricie. So it is that jealousy, which in love is equivalent to the loss of all happiness, outweighs any loss of reputation. It is then that she allows C  none (which is merely a name for the baser part of herself) to slander Hippolyte without taking upon herself the “burden of his defense” and thus sends the man who will have none of her to a fate the calamities of which are no consolation, however, to herself, since her own suicide follows immediately upon the death of Hippolyte. Thus at least it was, with a diminution of the part played by all the “Jansenist scruples,”³⁴ as Bergotte would have said, which Racine ascribed to Ph  dre to make her less guilty, that this scene appeared to me, a sort of prophecy of the amorous episodes in my own life. These reflections had, however, altered nothing in my determination, and I handed my letter to Fran  oise so that she might post it after all, in order to carry into effect that approach to Albertine that seemed to me to be indispensable, now that I had learned that my former attempt had failed. And no doubt we are wrong when we suppose that the fulfillment of our desire is a small matter, since as soon as we believe that it cannot be realized we become intent upon it once again and decide that it was not worth our while to pursue it only when we are quite certain that our attempt will not fail. And yet we are right also. For if this fulfillment, if our happiness appear of small account only in the light of certainty, nevertheless they are an unstable element from which only sorrows can arise. And those sorrows will be all the greater the more completely our desire will have been fulfilled, all the more impossible to

endure when our happiness has been, in defiance of the law of nature, prolonged for a certain time, when it has received the consecration of habit. In another sense as well, these two tendencies, the one that made me anxious that my letter should be posted, and, when I thought that it had gone, the one that made me regret that I had written it, have each of them a certain element of truth. In the case of the first tendency, it is too understandable that we should go in pursuit of our happiness—or misery—and that at the same time we should hope to keep before us, by this latest action that is about to involve us in its consequences, a state of expectancy that does not leave us in absolute despair, in a word that we should seek to convert into other forms, which, we imagine, must be less painful to us, the malady from which we are suffering. But the other tendency is no less important, for, born of our belief in the success of our enterprise, it is simply an anticipation of the disillusionment that we would very soon feel in the presence of a satisfied desire, our regret at having fixed for ourselves, at the expense of others that are necessarily excluded, this form of happiness. I had given the letter to Françoise and had asked her to go out at once and post it. As soon as my letter had gone, I began once more to think of Albertine's return as imminent. It did not fail to introduce into my mind certain pleasing images that neutralized somewhat by their attractions the dangers that I foresaw in her return. The pleasure, so long lost, of having her with me was intoxicating.

Time passes, and little by little everything that we have said in falsehood becomes true; I had learned this only too well with Gilberte; the indifference that I had feigned while never ceasing to weep had finally become true; little by little life, as I told Gilberte in a lying formula that retrospectively had become true, life had driven us apart. I remembered this, I said to myself: "If Albertine allows a few months to go by, my lies will become the truth. And now that the worst moments are over, ought I not to hope that she will allow this month to pass without returning? If she returns, I will have to renounce the true life that certainly I am not in a fit state to enjoy as yet, but which as time goes on may begin to offer me attractions while my memory of Albertine grows fainter." I don't deny that oblivion was beginning to perform its task. But one of the effects of oblivion was precisely—since it meant that many of Albertine's less pleasing aspects, of the boring hours that I had spent with her, no longer figured in my memory, ceased therefore to be reasons for my desiring her

not to be with me as I used to when she was still here—that it gave me a summary impression of her, embellished by all the love that I had ever felt for other women. In this particular form, oblivion that nevertheless was engaged in making me accustomed to our separation, made me, by showing me a more attractive Albertine, long all the more for her return.

Since her departure, very often, when I was confident that I showed no trace of tears, I would ring for Françoise and say to her: “We must make sure that Mademoiselle Albertine has left nothing behind. Remember to do her room so that it’s ready for her when she comes.” Or merely: “Only the other day Mademoiselle Albertine said to me, let me think now, it was the day before she left . . .” I was eager to diminish Françoise’s detestable pleasure at Albertine’s departure by letting her see that it was not to be prolonged. I wanted also to let Françoise see that I was not afraid to speak of this departure, to proclaim it—like certain generals who describe a forced retreat as a strategic withdrawal in conformity with a prearranged plan—as intended by myself, as constituting an episode the true meaning of which I concealed for the moment, but in no way implying the end of my friendship with Albertine. By repeating her name incessantly, I sought in short to introduce, like a breath of air, something of herself into that room in which her departure had left a vacuum, in which I could no longer breathe. Then, moreover, we seek to reduce the dimensions of our grief by making it fit into our everyday speech between ordering a suit of clothes and ordering dinner.

While she was doing Albertine’s room, Françoise, out of curiosity, opened the drawer of a little rosewood table in which my mistress used to put away the ornaments that she discarded when she went to bed. “Oh! Monsieur, Mademoiselle Albertine has forgotten to take her rings, they are still in the drawer.” My first impulse was to say: “We must send them to her.” But this would make me appear uncertain of her return. “Well,” I replied after a moment of silence, “it is hardly worth while sending them to her since she is coming back so soon. Give them to me, I will think about it.” Françoise handed me the rings with a distinct misgiving. She loathed Albertine, but, judging me by her own example, supposed that one could not give me a letter in my mistress’s handwriting without the risk of my opening it. I took the rings.

“Monsieur must take care not to lose them,” said Françoise, “such beauties as they are! I don’t know who gave them to her, if it was Monsieur

or someone else, but I can see that it was someone rich, who had good taste!”

“It was not me,” I assured her, “besides, they don’t both come from the same person, one was given her by her aunt and the other she bought for herself.”

“Not from the same person!” Françoise exclaimed, “Monsieur must be joking, they are just alike, except that one of them has had a ruby added to it, there’s the same eagle on both, the same initials inside.”

I do not know whether Françoise was conscious of the pain that she was causing me, but she began at this point to curve her lips in a smile that never left them.

“What, the same eagle? You are talking nonsense. It is true that the one without the ruby has an eagle on it, but the other has a sort of man’s head carved on it.”

“A man’s head, where did Monsieur discover that? I had only to put on my spectacles to see at once that it was one of the eagle’s wings; if Monsieur will take his magnifying glass, he will see the other wing on the other side, the head and the beak in the middle. You can count the feathers. Oh, it’s a fine piece of work.”

My intense anxiety to know whether Albertine had lied to me made me forget that I ought to maintain a certain dignity in Françoise’s presence and deny her the wicked pleasure that she felt, if not in torturing me, at least in disparaging my mistress. I remained breathless while Françoise went to fetch my magnifying glass, I took it from her, asked her to show me the eagle on the ring with the ruby; she had no difficulty in making me see the wings, stylized in the same way as on the other ring, the relief of each feather, the head. She pointed out to me also the similar inscriptions, to which, it is true, others were added on the ring with the ruby. And on the inside of both was Albertine’s monogram.

“But I’m surprised that it should need all this to make Monsieur see that the rings are the same,” said Françoise. “Even without examining them, you can see that it’s the same style, the same way of turning the gold, the same form. As soon as I looked at them I could have sworn that they came from the same place. You can see it just as easily as you can tell the dishes of a good cook.” And indeed, to the curiosity of a servant, whetted by hatred and trained to observe details with a startling precision, there had been added, to assist her in this expertise, the taste that she had, that same taste in

fact that she showed in her cuisine and that was intensified perhaps, as I had noticed when we left Paris for Balbec, in the way she dressed, by the coquetry of a woman who was once pretty, who has studied the jewels and dresses of other women. I might have taken the wrong box of medicine and, instead of swallowing a few capsules of veronal on a day when I felt that I had drunk too many cups of tea, might have swallowed as many capsules of caffeine, and my heart would not have throbbed more violently. I asked Françoise to leave the room. I would have liked to see Albertine immediately. To my horror at her falsehood, to my jealousy of the unknown donor, was added the pain that she should have allowed herself to accept such presents. I gave her even more, it is true, but a woman whom we are keeping does not seem to us to be a kept woman so long as we do not know that she is being kept by other men. And yet since I had continued to spend so much money upon her, I had taken her notwithstanding this moral baseness; I had encouraged this baseness in her, I had perhaps increased, perhaps created it. Then, just as we have the faculty of inventing stories to soothe our pain, just as we manage, when we are dying of hunger, to persuade ourselves that a stranger is going to leave us a fortune of a hundred millions, I imagined Albertine in my arms, explaining to me in a few words that it was because of the similarity of its workmanship that she had bought the second ring, that it was she who had had her initials engraved on it. But this explanation was still fragile, it had not yet had time to thrust into my mind its beneficent roots, and my pain could not be so quickly soothed. And I reflected that many men who tell their friends that their mistress is very sweet to them must suffer similar torments. Thus it is that they lie to others and to themselves. They do not altogether lie; they do spend in the woman's company hours that are truly pleasant; but let us not forget all that the kindness that their mistresses show them in front of their friends and that enables them to boast, and all that the sweetness that their mistresses show their lovers when they are alone with them, and that enables their lovers to bless them, conceals in the way of unrecorded hours in which the lover has suffered, doubted, sought everywhere in vain to discover the truth! It is to such sufferings that we attach the pleasure of loving, of delighting in a woman's most trivial remarks, remarks that we know to be trivial, but that we perfume with her scent. At this moment I could no longer find any delight in inhaling, by an act of memory, the scent of Albertine. Thunder-struck, holding the two rings in my hand, I stared at

that pitiless eagle whose beak was rending my heart, whose wings, chiseled in high relief, had borne away the confidence that I retained in my mistress, in whose claws my tortured mind was unable to escape for an instant from the incessantly recurring questions as to the stranger whose name the eagle doubtless symbolized, without however allowing me to decipher it, whom she had doubtless loved in the past, and whom she had doubtless seen again not so long ago, since it was on that day so pleasant, so intimate, of our drive together through the Bois that I had seen, for the first time, the second ring, the one on which the eagle appeared to be dipping his beak in the bright blood of the ruby.

If, however, from morning till night, I never ceased to grieve over Albertine's departure, this did not mean that I was thinking only of her. For one thing, her charm having acquired a gradual ascendancy over things that, in course of time, were entirely detached from her, but were nevertheless electrified by the same emotion that she gave me, if something made me think of Incarville or of the Verdurins, or of some new role that Léa was playing, a flood of suffering would overwhelm me. For another thing, what I myself called thinking of Albertine, was thinking of how I might bring her back, of how I might join her, might know what she was doing. With the result that if, during those hours of incessant martyrdom, there had been an illustrator present to represent the images that accompanied my sufferings, you would have seen pictures of the Gare d'Orsay,³⁵ of the bank notes offered to Mme Bontemps, of Saint-Loup stooping over the sloping desk of a telegraph office at which he was writing out a telegram for me, never the picture of Albertine. Just as, throughout the whole course of our life, our egoism sees before it all the time the objects that are of interest to ourselves, but never takes in that *I* itself that never ceases to observe them, so the desire that directs our actions descends toward them, but does not reascend to itself, whether because, being unduly utilitarian, it plunges into the action and disdains all knowledge of it, or because we have been looking to the future to compensate for the disappointments of the present, or because the inertia of our mind urges it to slide down the easy slope of imagination, rather than make it reascend the steep slope of introspection. In reality, in those hours of crisis in which we would stake our whole life, in proportion as the person on whom it depends reveals more clearly the immensity of the place that she occupies in our life, leaving nothing in the world that is not overthrown by her, so the image of that person diminishes until it is no

longer perceptible. In everything we find the effect of her presence in the emotion that we feel; herself, the cause, we do not find anywhere. I was during these days so incapable of forming any picture of Albertine that I could almost have believed that I was not in love with her, just as my mother, in the moments of despair in which she was incapable of ever forming any picture of my grandmother (except once in the chance encounter of a dream the importance of which she felt so intensely that she employed all the strength that remained to her in her sleep to make it last), might have accused and did in fact accuse herself of not missing her mother, whose death had been a mortal blow to her but whose features escaped her memory.

Why should I have supposed that Albertine did not care for women? Because she had said, especially of late, that she did not care for them: but did not our life rest upon a perpetual lie? Never once had she said to me: “Why is it that I cannot go out when and where I choose, why do you always ask other people what I have been doing?” And yet, after all, the conditions of her life were so unusual that she must have asked me this had she not herself guessed the reason. And to my silence as to the causes of her claustration, was it not comprehensible that she should correspond with a similar and constant silence as to her perpetual desires, her innumerable memories and hopes? Françoise looked as though she knew that I was lying when I alluded to the imminence of Albertine’s return. And her belief seemed to be founded upon something more than the truth that generally guided our old housekeeper, that masters do not like to be humiliated in front of their servants and allow them to know only so much of the truth as does not depart too far from a flattering fiction, calculated to maintain respect for themselves. This time, Françoise’s belief seemed to be founded upon something else, as though she had herself aroused, kept alive the distrust in Albertine’s mind, stimulated her anger, driven her in short to the point at which she could predict her departure as inevitable. If this was true, my version of a temporary absence, of which I had known and approved, could be received with nothing but incredulity by Françoise. But the idea that she had formed of Albertine’s venal nature, the exasperation with which, in her hatred, she multiplied the “profit” that Albertine was supposed to be making out of me, might to some extent give a check to that certainty. And so when in her hearing I made an allusion, as if to something that was altogether natural, to Albertine’s imminent return, Françoise would

look me in the face, to see whether I was making it up, in the same way in which, when the butler, to make her angry, read out to her, changing the words, some political news that she hesitated to believe, as for example the report of the closing of the churches and expulsion of the clergy, even from the other end of the kitchen, and without being able to read it, she would fix her gaze instinctively and greedily on the newspaper, as though she had been able to see whether the report was really written there.

But when Françoise saw that after writing a long letter I put on the envelope the address of Mme Bontemps, this alarm, hitherto quite vague, that Albertine might return, increased in her. It grew to a regular consternation when one morning she had to bring me with the rest of my mail a letter on the envelope of which she had recognized Albertine's handwriting. She asked herself whether Albertine's departure had not been a mere play-acting, a supposition that distressed her twice over as definitely assuring Albertine's future presence in the house, and as constituting for me, and thereby, in so far as I was Françoise's master, for her, the humiliation of having been tricked by Albertine. However great my impatience to read her letter, I could not refrain from studying for a moment Françoise's eyes from which all hope had fled, deducing from this presage the imminence of Albertine's return, as a lover of winter sports concludes with joy that the cold weather is at hand when he sees the swallows fly south. At length Françoise left me, and when I had made sure that she had shut the door behind her, I opened, noiselessly so as not to appear anxious, the letter that ran as follows: "My dear, thank you for all the nice things that you wrote to me, I am at your service to countermand the Rolls, if you think that I can help in any way, as I am sure I can. You have only to let me know the name of your agent. You would let yourself be taken in by these people whose only thought is of selling things, and what would you do with an automobile, you who never stir out of the house? I am deeply touched that you have kept a happy memory of our last outing. You may be sure that for my part I will never forget that twofold twilight drive (since night was falling and we were about to part) and that it will be effaced from my memory only when the darkness is complete."³⁶

I felt that this final sentence was merely a sentence and that Albertine could not possibly retain until her death any such sweet memory of this drive from which she had certainly derived no pleasure since she had been

impatient to leave me. But I was impressed also, when I thought of the cyclist, the golfer of Balbec, who had read nothing but *Esther*³⁷ before she made my acquaintance, to find how gifted she was and how right I had been in thinking that she had in my house enriched herself with new qualities that made her different and more complete. And thus, the words that I had said to her at Balbec: “I feel that my friendship would be of value to you, that I am just the person who could give you what you lack”—I had written as a dedication on a photograph that I gave her: “with the certainty of being beneficial”—these words, which I uttered without believing them and simply so that she might find some benefit in my society that would outweigh any possible boredom, these words turned out to have been true as well; as, for that matter, when I said to her that I did not wish to see her for fear of falling in love with her. I had said this because on the contrary I knew that in constant companionship my love grew cold and that separation kindled it, but in reality our constant companionship had given rise to a need of her that was infinitely stronger than my love in the first weeks at Balbec.

But Albertine’s letter did not help matters in any way. She spoke to me only of writing to my agent. It was necessary to escape from this situation, to cut matters short, and I had the following idea. I sent a letter at once to Andrée in which I told her that Albertine was at her aunt’s, that I felt very lonely, that she would be giving me an immense pleasure if she came and stayed with me for a few days and that, as I did not wish to make a mystery of it, I begged her to inform Albertine of this. And at the same time I wrote to Albertine as though I had not yet received her letter:

“My dear, forgive me for doing something that you will understand so well, I have such a hatred of secrecy that I wanted you to be informed by her and by me. I have acquired, from having you staying so charmingly in the house with me, the bad habit of not being able to be alone. Since we have decided that you are not to come back, it has occurred to me that the person who would best fill your place, because she would make the least change in my life, would remind me the most of you, is Andrée, and I have asked her to come. So that all this may not appear too sudden, I have spoken to her only of a short visit, but between ourselves I am fairly certain that this time it will be permanent. Don’t you agree that I am right? You know that your little group of girls at Balbec has always been the social unit that has exerted the greatest influence on me, in which I was very happy to

be eventually included. No doubt it is this influence that is still making itself felt. Since the fatal incompatibility of our characters and the mischances of life have decreed that my little Albertine can never be my wife, I believe that I will nevertheless find a wife—less charming than herself, but one whom greater natural affinities will enable perhaps to be happier with me—in Andrée.”

But after having sent this letter, the suspicion occurred to me suddenly that, when Albertine wrote to me: “I would have been only too delighted to come back if you had written to me directly,” she had said this only because I had not written to her directly, and that, had I done so, she would still not have come back; that she would be glad to know that Andrée was staying with me, was to be my wife, provided that she herself remained free, because she could now, as for the past week, destroying the hourly precautions that I had taken during more than six months in Paris, abandon herself to her vices and do what, minute by minute, I had prevented her from doing. I told myself that probably she was making an improper use, down there, of her freedom, and no doubt this idea that I formed seemed to me sad but remained general, showing me no special details, and, by the indefinite number of possible mistresses that it allowed me to imagine, prevented me from stopping to consider any one of them, drew my mind on in a sort of perpetual motion not free from pain but tinged with a pain that the absence of any concrete image rendered endurable. It ceased however to be endurable and became atrocious when Saint-Loup arrived. Before I explain why the information that he gave me made me so unhappy, I ought to relate an incident that took place immediately before his visit and the memory of which so distressed me afterward that it weakened, if not the painful impression that was made on me by my conversation with Saint-Loup, at any rate the practical effect of this conversation. This incident was as follows. Burning with impatience to see Saint-Loup, I was waiting for him on the staircase (a thing that I could not have done had my mother been at home, for it was what she most detested, next to “talking from the window”) when I heard the following words: “Do you mean to say you don’t know how to get a fellow sacked whom you don’t like? It’s not difficult. For example, you need only hide the things that he has to take in. Then, when his employers are in a hurry and ring for him, he can’t find anything, he loses his head. My aunt will be furious with him, and will say

to you: 'But what is the man doing?' When he does show his face, everybody will be raging, and he won't have what is needed. After this has happened four or five times, you may be sure that they'll sack him, especially if you take care to dirty the things that he is supposed to bring in clean, and many other tricks of that kind." I remained speechless with astonishment, for these cruel, Machiavellian words were uttered by the voice of Saint-Loup. Now I had always regarded him as so kind, so tenderhearted a person that this speech had the same effect upon me as if he had been acting the part of Satan in a play: it could not be in his own name that he was speaking. "But after all a man has got to earn his living," said the other person, of whom I then caught sight and who was one of the Duchesse de Guermantes's footmen. "What the hell does that matter to you so long as you're all right?" Saint-Loup replied callously. "It will be all the more fun for you, having a scapegoat. You can easily spill ink over his livery just when he has to go and serve at a big dinner party, and never leave him in peace for a moment until he's only too glad to give notice. Anyhow, I can lend a hand, I will tell my aunt that I admire your patience in working with a great lout like that, and so untidy too." I showed myself, Saint-Loup came to greet me, but my confidence in him was shaken since I had heard him speak in a manner so different from anything that I knew. And I asked myself whether a person who was capable of acting so cruelly toward a poor and defenseless man might not have played the part of a traitor toward me, on his mission to Mme Bontemps. This reflection served mainly in helping me not to regard his failure as a proof that I myself might not succeed, after he had left me. But so long as he was with me, it was nevertheless of the Saint-Loup of long ago and especially of the friend who had just come from Mme Bontemps that I thought. He began by saying: "You feel that I ought to have telephoned to you more often, but I was always told that you were engaged." But the point at which my pain became unendurable was when he said: "To begin where my last telegram left you, after passing through a sort of shed, I entered the house and at the end of a long corridor was shown into a drawing room." At these words, shed, corridor, drawing room, and before he had even finished uttering them, my heart was shattered more swiftly than by an electric current, for the force that circles the earth most times in a second is not electricity, but pain. How I repeated them to myself, renewing the shock as I chose, these words, shed, corridor, drawing room, after Saint-Loup had left me! In a shed one girl can

lie down with another. And in that drawing room who could tell what Albertine did when her aunt was not there? What was this? Had I then imagined the house in which she was living as incapable of possessing either a shed or a drawing room? No, I had not imagined it at all, except as a vague place. I had suffered originally at the geographical identification of the place where Albertine was, when I had learned that, instead of being in two or three possible places, she was in Touraine; those words uttered by her concierge had marked in my heart as upon a map the place where finally I must suffer. But once I had grown accustomed to the idea that she was in a house in Touraine, I had not seen the house; never had there occurred to my imagination this appalling idea of a drawing room, a shed, a corridor, that seemed to be facing me in the retina of Saint-Loup's eyes, who had seen them, these rooms in which Albertine came and went, was living her life, these rooms in particular and not an infinity of possible rooms that had canceled one another out. With the words shed, corridor, drawing room, I became aware of my folly in having left Albertine for a week in this accursed place, whose *existence* (instead of the mere possibility) had just been revealed to me. Alas! when Saint-Loup told me also that in this drawing room he had heard someone singing at the top of her voice in an adjoining room and that it was Albertine who was singing, I realized with despair that, rid of me at last, she was happy! She had regained her freedom. And I who had been thinking that she would come to take the place of Andrée! My grief turned to anger with Saint-Loup. "That is the one thing in the world that I asked you to avoid, that she should know of your coming." "If you think it was easy! They had assured me that she was not in the house. Oh, I know very well that you aren't pleased with me, I could tell that from your telegrams. But you are not being fair to me, I did all that I could." Set free once more, having left the cage from which, here at home, I used to remain for days on end without making her come to my room, Albertine had regained all her value in my eyes, she had become once more the person whom everyone pursued, the marvelous bird of the earliest days. "However, let us get back to business. As for the question of the money, I don't know what to say to you, I found myself addressing a woman who seemed to me to be so scrupulous that I was afraid of offending her. However, she didn't say no when I mentioned the money to her. In fact, a little later she told me that she was touched to find that we understood one another so well. And yet everything that she said after that was so delicate,

so refined, that it seemed to me impossible that she could have been referring to my offer of money when she said: 'We understand one another so well,' for after all I was behaving like a cad." "But perhaps she did not understand what you meant, perhaps she didn't hear you, you ought to have repeated the offer, for then certainly that would have solved everything." "But how can she not have heard me? I spoke to her as I am speaking to you, she is neither deaf nor mad." "And she made no comment?" "None." "You ought to have repeated the offer." "How do you mean, repeat it? As soon as we met I saw what sort of person she was, I said to myself that you had made a mistake, that you were making me commit the most awful gaffe, and that it would be terribly difficult to offer her the money like that. I did it, however, to oblige you, feeling certain that she would turn me out of the house." "But she did not. Therefore, either she had not heard you and you should have started over, or you could have stayed on the subject." "You say: 'She had not heard,' because you were here in Paris, but, I repeat, if you had been present at our conversation, there was not a sound to interrupt us, I said it quite bluntly, it is not possible that she failed to understand." "But anyhow is she quite convinced that I have always wanted to marry her niece?" "No, as to that, if you want my opinion, she did not believe that you had any intention of marrying the girl. She told me that you yourself had informed her niece that you wished to leave her. I don't really know whether even now she is convinced that you wish to marry." This reassured me slightly by showing me that I was less humiliated, and therefore more capable of being still loved, more free to take some decisive action. Nevertheless, I was in torments. "I am sorry, because I can see that you are not pleased." "Yes, I am touched by your kindness, I am grateful to you, but it seems to me that you might have . . ." "I did my best. No one else could have done more or even as much. Try sending someone else." "No, as a matter of fact, if I had known, I would not have sent you, but the failure of your attempt prevents me from making another." I heaped reproaches upon him: he had tried to do me a service and had not succeeded. Saint-Loup as he left the house³⁸ had met some girls coming in. I had often supposed that Albertine knew other girls in the vicinity; but this was the first time that I felt the torture of that supposition. It really seems as if nature has allowed our mind to secrete a natural antidote that destroys the suppositions that we form, at once without intermission and without danger; but there was nothing to render me immune from these girls whom Saint-

Loup had met. But all these details, were they not precisely what I had sought to learn from everyone with regard to Albertine? Wasn't I the one who, in order to learn them more fully, had begged Saint-Loup, summoned back to Paris by his colonel, to come and see me at all costs? Wasn't it therefore I who had desired them, or rather my famished grief, longing to feed and to grow fat upon them? Finally, Saint-Loup told me that he had had the pleasant surprise of meeting, quite near the house, the only familiar face and one that had reminded him of the past, a former friend of Rachel, a pretty actress who was taking a vacation in the neighborhood. And the name of this actress was enough to make me say to myself: "Perhaps it is with her"; was enough to make me behold, in the arms even of a woman whom I did not know, Albertine smiling and flushed with pleasure. And after all why should not this have been true? Had I found fault with myself for thinking of other women since I had known Albertine? On the evening of my first visit to the Princesse de Guermantes, when I returned home, had I not been thinking far less of her than of the girl of whom Saint-Loup had told me who frequented brothels and of Mme Putbus's maid? Was it not in the hope of meeting the latter of these that I had returned to Balbec? More recently, had I not longed to go to Venice? Why then might Albertine not have longed to go to Touraine? Only, when it came to the point, as I now realized, I would not have left her, I would not have gone to Venice. Even in my own heart of hearts, when I said to myself: "I will leave her presently," I knew that I would never leave her, just as I knew that I would never settle down again to work, or live a healthy life, or do any of the things that, day by day, I vowed that I would do tomorrow. Only, whatever I might feel in my heart, I had thought it more adroit to let her live under the perpetual menace of a separation. And no doubt, thanks to my detestable adroitness, I had convinced her only too well. In any case, now, things could not go on like this. I could not leave her in Touraine with those girls, with that actress; I could not endure the thought of this life that was escaping my control. I would await her reply to my letter: if she was doing wrong, alas! a day more or less made no difference (and perhaps I said this to myself because, being no longer in the habit of taking note of every minute of her life, whereas a single minute in which she was unobserved would formerly have driven me out of my mind, my jealousy no longer observed the same division of time). But as soon as I should have received her answer, if she was not coming back, I would go to fetch her; willingly or by force, I would

tear her away from her women friends. Besides, was it not better for me to go down in person, now that I had discovered the malicious nature, hitherto unsuspected by me, of Saint-Loup? He might, for all I knew, have organized a plot to separate me from Albertine. Was it because I had changed, or because I could not have imagined that natural causes would bring me one day to this unusual situation, but how I would have lied now had I written to her, as I used to say to her in Paris, that I hoped that no accident might befall her! Ah! if some accident had happened to her, my life, instead of being poisoned forever by this incessant jealousy, would at once regain, if not happiness, at least a state of calm through the suppression of suffering.

The suppression of suffering? Can I really have believed it, have believed that death merely strikes out what exists, and leaves everything else in its place, that it removes the pain from the heart of him for whom the other person's existence has ceased to be anything but a source of pain, that it removes the pain and substitutes nothing in its place? The suppression of pain! As I glanced at the miscellaneous news items in the newspapers, I regretted that I had not had the courage to form the same wish as Swann. If Albertine could have been the victim of an accident, were she alive I would have had a pretext for hastening to her bedside, were she dead I would have recovered, as Swann said, my freedom to live as I chose. Did I believe this? He had believed it, that subtlest of men who thought that he knew himself well. How little do we know what we have in our heart. How clearly, a little later, had he been still alive, I could have proved to him that his wish was not only criminal but absurd, that the death of the woman he loved would have set him free from nothing!

I forsook all pride with regard to Albertine, I sent her a despairing telegram begging her to return upon any conditions, telling her that she might do anything she liked, that I asked only to be allowed to take her in my arms for a minute three times a week, before she went to bed. And had she said, "Once a week only," I would have accepted the restriction. She never returned. My telegram had just gone to her when I myself received one. It was from Mme Bontemps. The world is not created once and for all time for each of us individually. There are added to it in the course of our life things of which we have never had any suspicion. Alas! it was not a suppression of suffering that was wrought in me by the first two lines of the telegram: MY POOR FRIEND, OUR LITTLE ALBERTINE IS NO

MORE; FORGIVE ME FOR BREAKING THIS TERRIBLE NEWS TO YOU WHO WERE SO FOND OF HER. SHE WAS THROWN BY HER HORSE AGAINST A TREE WHILE SHE WAS OUT RIDING. ALL OUR EFFORTS TO RESTORE HER TO LIFE WERE UNAVAILING. IF ONLY I WERE DEAD IN HER PLACE! No, not the suppression of suffering, but a suffering until then unimagined, that of learning that she would not come back. But had I not told myself many times that, quite possibly, she would not come back? I had indeed told myself so, but now I saw that never for a moment had I believed it. As I needed her presence, her kisses, to enable me to endure the pain that my suspicions wrought in me, I had formed, since our Balbec days, the habit of being always with her. Even when she had gone out, when I was left alone, I was kissing her still. I had continued to do so since her departure for Touraine. I had less need of her fidelity than of her return. And if my reason might with impunity cast a doubt now and then about her return, my imagination never ceased for an instant to picture it. Instinctively I passed my hand over my throat, over my lips that felt themselves kissed by her lips still after she had gone away, and would never be kissed by them again; I passed my hands over them, as Mamma had caressed me at the time of grandmother's death, when she said: "My poor boy, your grandmother, who was so fond of you, will never kiss you again." All my life to come seemed to have been wrenched from my heart. My life to come? I had not then thought at times of living it without Albertine? Of course not! For a long time had I, then, been pledging to her every minute of my life until my death? Why, of course! This future indissolubly blended with hers I had never had the vision to perceive, but now that it had just been shattered, I could feel the place that it occupied in my gaping heart. Françoise, who still knew nothing, came into my room; in a sudden fury I shouted at her: "What do you want?" Then (there are sometimes words that set a different reality in the same place as the one that confronts us; they stun us as does a sudden fit of vertigo) she said to me: "Monsieur has no need to look cross. I've got something here that will make him very happy. Here are two letters from Mademoiselle Albertine." I felt, afterward, that I must have stared at her with the eyes of a man whose mind has become unbalanced. I was not even glad, nor was I incredulous. I was like a person who sees the same place in his room occupied by a sofa and by a grotto: nothing seeming to him more real, he collapses on the floor. Albertine's two letters must have been written a short while before the fatal ride. The first

said: "My dear, I must thank you for the proof of your confidence in me by telling me of your plan to get Andrée to stay with you. I am sure that she will be delighted to accept, and I think that it will be a very good thing for her. With her talents, she will know how to make the most of the companionship of a man like yourself, and of the admirable influence that you manage to exert over other people. I feel that you have had an idea from which as much good may spring for her as for yourself. And so, if she should make the slightest difficulty (which I don't suppose), telegraph me, I will undertake to bring pressure to bear upon her." The second was dated on the following day. (As a matter of fact, she must have written the two letters within a few minutes of each other, possibly at the same time, and must have antedated the first. For, all the time, I had been forming an absurd idea of her intentions, which had been only this: to return to me, and which anyone with no direct interest in the matter, a man lacking in imagination, the negotiator of a peace treaty, the merchant who has to examine a transaction, would have judged more accurately than myself.) It contained only these words: "Is it too late for me to return to you? If you have not yet written to Andrée, would you be prepared to take me back? I will abide by your decision, but I beg you not to be long in letting me know, you can imagine how impatiently I will be waiting. If it is telling me to return, I will take the train at once. With all my heart, yours, Albertine."

For the death of Albertine to have been able to end my suffering, the shock of the fall would have had to kill her not only in Touraine but in myself. There, never had she been more alive. In order to enter into us, another person must first have assumed the form, have adapted himself to the framework of time; appearing to us only in a succession of momentary flashes, he has never been able to furnish us with more than one aspect of himself at a time, to reveal to us more than a single photograph of himself. A great weakness, no doubt, for a person to consist merely of a collection of moments; a great strength also: he arises from memory, and our memory of a moment is not informed of everything that has happened since; this moment that it has recorded endures still, lives still, and with it the person whose form is outlined in it. And moreover, this disintegration does not only make the dead woman live, it multiplies her. To find consolation, it was not one, it was innumerable Albertines that I must first forget. When I

had reached the stage of enduring the grief of losing this Albertine, I must begin again with another, with a hundred others.

So, then, my life was entirely altered. What had created its sweetness—not because of Albertine, but concurrently with her, when I was alone—was precisely the perpetual resurgence, at the bidding of identical moments, of moments from the past. From the sound of the rain I recaptured the scent of the lilacs at Combray, from the shifting of the sun’s rays on the balcony, the pigeons in the Champs-Élysées, from the muffling of all noise in the heat of the morning hours, the cool taste of cherries, the longing for Brittany or Venice from the sound of the wind and the return of Easter. Summer was at hand, the days were long, the weather warm. It was the season when, early in the morning, pupils and teachers go to the public gardens to prepare for the final examinations under the trees, seeking to extract the sole drop of coolness that is let fall by a sky less ardent than in the midday heat but already as sterilely pure. From my darkened room, with a power of evocation equal to that of former days but capable now of evoking only pain, I felt that outside, in the heaviness of the atmosphere, the setting sun was plastering the vertical fronts of houses and churches with a tawny distemper. And if Françoise, when she came in, disturbed, by accident, the folds of the big curtains, I stifled a cry of pain at the gash that had just been made in my heart by that ray of long-ago sunlight that had made beautiful in my eyes the modern façade of Marcouville l’Orgueilleuse,³⁹ when Albertine had said to me: “It is restored.” Not knowing how to account to Françoise for my groan, I said to her: “Oh, I am so thirsty.” She left the room, returned, but I turned sharply away, under the painful discharge of one of the thousand invisible memories that at every moment burst into view in the surrounding darkness: I had noticed that she had brought in a jug of cider and a dish of cherries, cider and cherries that a farm boy had brought out to us in the carriage, at Balbec, “kinds” in which I would have made the most perfect communion, in those days, with the prismatic gleam in shuttered dining rooms on days of scorching heat. Then I thought for the first time of the farm called Les Ecorres, and said to myself that on certain days when Albertine had told me, at Balbec, that she would not be free, that she was obliged to go somewhere with her aunt, she had perhaps been with one or another of her girlfriends at some farm to which she knew that I was not in the habit of going, and, while I waited desperately for her at Marie-Antoinette⁴⁰ where they told me: “No, we have not seen her today,” had

been saying to her friend the same words as she used to say to me when we went out together: "He will never think of looking for us here, so there's no fear of our being disturbed." I told Françoise to draw the curtains together, so that I could no longer see that ray of sunlight. But it continued to filter through, just as corrosive, into my memory. "It doesn't appeal to me, it has been restored, but we will go tomorrow to Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, and the day after to . . ." Tomorrow, the day after, it was a prospect of life shared in common, perhaps for all time, that was opening; my heart leaped toward it, but it was no longer there, Albertine was dead.

I asked Françoise the time. Six o'clock. At last, thank God, that oppressive heat about which in the past I used to complain to Albertine and which we so enjoyed, was about to be lifted. The day was drawing to its close. But what did that profit me? The cool evening air came in; it was sunset; in my memory, at the end of a road that we had taken, she and I, on our way home, I saw it now, more remote than the farthest village, like some distant station inaccessible that evening, which we would spend at Balbec, still together. Together then; now I must stop short on the brink of that same abyss; she was dead. It was not enough now to draw the curtains, I tried to stop the eyes and ears of my memory in order not to see that band of orange in the western sky, in order not to hear those invisible birds responding from one tree to the next on either side of me who was then so tenderly embraced by her who now was dead. I tried to avoid those sensations that are given us by the dampness of leaves in the evening air, the steep rise and fall of humpback roads. But already those sensations had gripped me again, carried me far enough back from the present moment to gather all the recoil, all the necessary élan to strike me anew, with the idea that Albertine was dead. Ah! never again would I enter a forest, would I stroll beneath the spreading trees. But would the broad plains be less cruel to me? How many times had I crossed, going in search of Albertine, how many times had I entered, on my return with her, the great plain of Cricqueville,⁴¹ now in foggy weather when the flooding mist gave us the illusion of being surrounded by a vast lake, now on limpid evenings when the moonlight, dematerializing the earth, making it appear, from a few steps away, celestial, as it is, in the daytime, in the distance only, enclosed the fields, the woods, with the firmament to which it had assimilated them, in the moss-agate of a universal blue!

Françoise was bound to rejoice at Albertine's death, and it should, in fairness to her, be said that by a sort of decorum and tact she made no pretense of sorrow. But the unwritten laws of her immemorial code and the tradition of the medieval peasant woman who weeps as in the romances of chivalry⁴² were older than her hatred of Albertine and even of Eulalie. And so, on one of these late afternoons, as I was not quick enough in concealing my distress, she caught sight of my tears, served by the instinct of a little old peasant woman which at one time had led her to catch and torture animals, to feel only merriment in wringing the necks of chickens and in boiling lobsters alive, and, when I was ill, in observing, as it might be the wounds that she had inflicted on an owl, my suffering expression that she afterward proclaimed in a sepulchral tone and as a presage of coming disaster. But her Combray "customary" did not permit her to treat lightly tears, grief, things that in her judgment were as fatal as shedding one's flannels in spring or eating when one had no "stomach" for it. "Oh, no. Monsieur, it doesn't do to cry like that, it isn't good for you." And in her attempt to stem my tears she looked as anxious as if they had been torrents of blood. Unfortunately, I adopted a chilly air that cut short the effusions in which she was hoping to indulge, and which might quite well, for that matter, have been sincere. Her attitude toward Albertine had been, perhaps, akin to her attitude toward Eulalie, and, now that my mistress could no longer derive any profit from me, Françoise had ceased to hate her. She felt bound, however, to let me see that she was perfectly well aware that I was crying, and that, following the deplorable example set by my family, I did not wish to "let it be seen." "You mustn't cry, Monsieur," she adjured me, in a calmer tone this time, and intending to prove her own perspicacity rather than to show me any compassion. And she went on: "It was bound to happen; she was too happy, poor creature, she never knew how happy she was."

How slow the day is in dying on these interminable summer evenings! A pale ghost of the house opposite continued indefinitely to sketch upon the sky its persistent whiteness. At last it was dark in the apartment; I stumbled against the furniture in the hall, but in the door that opened on to the staircase, in the midst of the darkness that I had believed to be complete, the glazed panel was translucent and blue, with the blue of a flower, the blue of an insect's wing, a blue that would have seemed to me beautiful if I had not

felt it to be a last reflection, trenchant as a blade of steel, a final blow that in its indefatigable cruelty the day was still dealing me.

In the end, however, the darkness became complete, but then a glimpse of a star behind one of the trees in the courtyard was enough to remind me of how we used to set out in a carriage, after dinner, for the woods of Chantepie, carpeted with moonlight. And even in the streets it would so happen that I could isolate upon the back of a bench, could gather there the natural purity of a moonbeam in the midst of the artificial lights of Paris, of that Paris over which it enthroned—by making the city return for a moment, in my imagination, to a state of nature, with the infinite silence of the fields thus evoked—the heartrending memory of the walks that I had taken there with Albertine. Ah! When would the night end? But at the first cool breath of dawn I shivered, for it had revived in me the delight of that summer when, from Balbec to Incarville,⁴³ from Incarville to Balbec, we had so many times escorted each other home until the break of day. I had now only one hope left for the future—a hope far more heartrending than any fear—which was that I might forget Albertine. I knew that I would one day forget her; I had forgotten Gilberte, Mme de Guermantes; I had quite forgotten my grandmother. And it is our most fitting and most cruel punishment for that so complete oblivion, as tranquil as the oblivion of the graveyard, by which we have detached ourselves from those whom we no longer love, that we can see this same oblivion to be inevitable in the case of those whom we love still. To tell the truth, we know it to be a state not painful, a state of indifference. But not being able to think at the same time of what I was and of what I would one day be, I thought with despair of all that integument of caresses, of kisses, of friendly slumber, of which I must presently let myself be stripped for all time. The rush of these tender memories, sweeping on to break against the idea that Albertine was dead, oppressed me by the clash of their baffled waves so that I could not remain still; I rose, but all of a sudden I stopped in consternation; the same faint daybreak that I used to see at the moment when I had just left Albertine, still radiant and warm from her kisses, had come into the room and bared, above the curtains, its blade now a sinister portent, whose whiteness, cold, implacable and compact, entered the room like a dagger thrust into my heart.

Presently the sounds from the streets would begin, enabling me to tell from the qualitative scale of their resonance the degree of the steadily increasing heat in which they were resounding. But in this heat that, a few

hours later, would become saturated with the fragrance of cherries, what I found (as in a medicine which the substitution of one ingredient for another is sufficient to transform from the stimulant and tonic that it was into a depressant) was no longer the desire for women but the anguish of Albertine's departure. Besides, the memory of all my desires was as much impregnated with her, and with suffering, as the memory of my pleasures. That Venice where I had thought that her company would be a nuisance (doubtless because I had felt in a confused way that it would be necessary to me), now that Albertine was no more, I preferred not to go there. Albertine had seemed to me to be an obstacle interposed between me and everything else, because she was for me their container, and it was from her as from a vase that I might receive them. Now that this vase was shattered, I no longer felt that I had the heart to grasp things; there was not one of them from which I did not turn away, despondent, preferring not to taste it. So that my separation from her did not in the least throw open to me the field of possible pleasures that I had imagined to be closed to me by her presence. Besides, the obstacle that her presence had perhaps indeed been in the way of my traveling, of my enjoying life, had only (as always happens) masked other obstacles that reappeared intact now that this first one had been removed. It had been in the same way that, in the past, when some friend had called to see me and had prevented me from working, if on the following day I was left undisturbed, I did not work any more. Let an illness, a duel, a runaway horse make us see death face to face, how richly we would have enjoyed the life of pleasure, the travels in unknown lands, which are about to be snatched from us. And no sooner is the danger past than what we find once again before us is the same dull life in which none of those delights existed for us.

No doubt these nights that are so short last only for a brief season. Winter would at length return, when I would no longer have to dread the memory of drives with her until the too early dawn. But would not the first frosts bring back to me, preserved in their ice, the germ of my first desires, when at midnight I used to send for her, when the time seemed so long until I heard her ring the bell: a sound for which I might now wait eternally in vain? Would they not bring back to me the germ of my first anxieties, when, upon two occasions, I thought that she was not coming? At that time I saw her but rarely, but even those intervals between her visits that made her emerge, after many weeks, from the heart of an unknown life that I made no

effort to possess, ensured my peace of mind by preventing the first inklings, constantly interrupted, of my jealousy from coagulating, from forming a solid mass in my heart. As soothing as they may have been at the time, in retrospect, those intervals were stamped with pain since the unknown things she might have done in the course of them had ceased to be a matter of indifference to me, and especially now that no visit from her would ever come again; so that those January evenings on which she used to come, and which, for that reason, had been so dear to me, would waft into me now with their biting winds an anxiety that then I did not know, and would bring back to me (but now grown pernicious) the first germ of my love. And when I thought of the return of that cold season, which since the time of Gilberte and my games in the Champs-Élysées, had always seemed to me so depressing; when I thought of the return of evenings like that evening of snow when I had vainly, far into the night, waited for Albertine to come, then like an invalid who chooses the best place, in his case physically, for his lungs, but in my case mentally, what at such moments I still dreaded most for my grief, for my heart, was the return of the intense cold, and I said to myself that what it would be hardest to live through was perhaps the winter. Linked as it was to each of the seasons, in order for me to discard the memory of Albertine I would have had to forget them all, prepared to begin to learn them again, as an old man after a stroke learns to read again; I would have had first to renounce the entire universe. Nothing, I told myself, but an actual extinction of myself would be capable (but that was impossible) of consoling me for hers. I did not realize that the death of oneself is neither impossible nor extraordinary; it is effected without our knowledge, it may be against our will, every day of our life, and I would have to suffer from the recurrence of all sorts of days which not only nature but adventitious circumstances, a purely conventional order introduce into a season. Presently would return the day on which I had gone to Balbec in that earlier summer when my love, which was not yet inseparable from jealousy and did not worry about what Albertine would be doing all day, had still to undergo so many evolutions before becoming that very different love of the latest period, that this final year, in which Albertine's destiny had begun to change and had received its quietus, appeared to me full, diverse, vast, like a whole century. Then it would be the memory of days more slow in reviving but dating from still earlier years; the rainy Sundays on which nevertheless everyone else had gone out, in the void of the

afternoon, when the sound of wind and rain would in the past have bidden me stay at home, to “philosophize in my garret”;⁴⁴ with what anxiety would I see the hour approach at which Albertine, so little expected, had come to visit me, had caressed me for the first time, breaking off because Françoise had brought in the lamp,⁴⁵ in that time now doubly dead when it had been Albertine who was curious about me, when my tenderness for her might legitimately nourish so strong a hope! Even later in the season, those glorious evenings when the windows of pantries, of girls’ schools, standing open to the view like wayside shrines, bathed in golden dust, allow the street to crown itself with a diadem of those demigoddesses who, conversing not far from us with others of their kind, fill us with a feverish longing to penetrate into their mythological existence, reminded me now only of the tenderness of Albertine, whose company by my side was an obstacle to my approaching them.⁴⁶

Moreover, to the memory even of hours that were purely natural would inevitably be added the mental background that makes each of them a thing apart. When, later on, I would hear the goatherd’s horn, on a first fine, almost Italian morning, that same day would blend alternately with its sunshine the anxiety of knowing that Albertine was at the Trocadéro, possibly with Léa and the two girls, then her kindly, domestic gentleness, almost that of a wife who seemed to me then an embarrassment and whom Françoise was bringing home to me. That telephone message from Françoise that had conveyed to me the obedient homage of an Albertine returning with her, I had thought at the time that it made me swell with pride. I was mistaken. If it had exhilarated me, that was because it had made me feel that she whom I loved was really mine, lived only for me, and even at a distance, without my needing to occupy my mind with her, regarded me as her lord and master, returning home at a sign from me. And thus that telephone message had been a particle of sweetness, coming to me from afar, sent out from that Trocadéro quarter where there happened to be, for me, sources of happiness directing toward me molecules of comfort, healing balms, restoring to me at length so precious a freedom of mind that I need do no more, surrendering myself without the restriction of a single care to Wagner’s music, than await the certain arrival of Albertine, without agitation, with an entire absence of impatience in which I had not had the perspicacity to recognize true happiness. And this happiness that she should

return, that she should obey me and be mine, the cause of it lay in love and not in pride. It would have been quite immaterial to me now to have at my behest fifty women returning, at a sign from me, not from the Trocadéro but from the Indies. But that day, conscious of Albertine who, while I sat alone in my room playing music, was coming dutifully to join me, I had breathed in, where it lay scattered like motes in a sunbeam, one of those substances that, just as others are salutary to the body, do good to the soul. Then there had been, half an hour later, Albertine's arrival, then the drive with Albertine, both of which I had thought boring because they were accompanied for me by certainty, but which, on account of that very certainty, had, from the moment of Françoise's telephoning to me that she was bringing Albertine home, let flow a golden calm over the hours that followed, had made of them as it were a second day, wholly unlike the first, because it had a completely different emotional basis, an emotional basis that made it an original day, which came and added itself to the variety of the days that I had previously known, a day that I would never have been able to imagine—any more than we could imagine the delicious idleness of a day in summer if such days did not exist in the calendar of those through which we had lived—a day of which I could not say absolutely that I recalled it, for to this calm I added now an anguish that I had not felt at the time. But much later, when I went over little by little, in reverse order, the times through which I had passed before I was so much in love with Albertine, when my healed heart could detach itself without suffering from Albertine dead, then I was able to recall at length without suffering that day on which Albertine had gone shopping with Françoise instead of remaining at the Trocadéro; I recalled that day with pleasure, as belonging to an emotional season that I had not known until then; I recalled it at last exactly, without adding to it now any suffering, rather, on the contrary, as we recall certain days in summer that we found too hot while they lasted, and from which only after they have passed do we extract their unalloyed standard of fine gold and imperishable azure.

So that these several years imposed upon my memory of Albertine, which made them so painful, the successive coloring, the different modulations, the embers not only of their seasons or of their hours, from late afternoons in June to winter evenings, from moonlight to dawn that broke as I was on my way home, from snow in Paris to fallen leaves at Saint-Cloud, but also of each of the particular ideas of Albertine that I

successively formed, of the physical aspect in which I pictured her at each of those moments, the degree of frequency with which I had seen her during that season, which itself appeared consequently more or less dispersed or compact, the anxieties that she might have caused me by keeping me waiting, the desire that I had felt at a given moment for her, the hopes formed and then abandoned; all of these modified the character of my retrospective sadness fully as much as the impressions of light or of scents that were associated with it, and completed each of the solar years through which I had lived—years that, simply with their springtimes, their autumns, their winters, were already so sad because of the inseparable memory of her—complementing each of them with a sort of sentimental year in which the hours were defined not by the sun's position, but by the strain of waiting for a rendezvous; in which the length of the days during which the changes of temperature were measured by the soaring flight of my hopes, the progress of our intimacy, the gradual transformation of her face, the journeys that she had made, the frequency and style of the letters that she had written me during her absence and her more or less eager anxiety to see me on her return. And lastly if these changes of weather, if these different days each brought me another Albertine, it was not only by evoking similar moments. The reader will remember that always, even before I began to be in love, each day had made me a different person, swayed by other desires because he had other perceptions, a person who, whereas he had dreamed only of cliffs and tempests overnight, if the indiscreet spring dawn had distilled a scent of roses through the gaping portals of his house of sleep, would awake ready to set off for Italy. Even in my love, had not the changing state of my emotional atmosphere, the varying pressure of my beliefs, had they not one day diminished the visibility of the love that I was feeling, had they not another day extended it beyond all bounds, one day embellished it to a smile, another day condensed it to a storm? We exist only by virtue of what we possess, we possess only what is really present to us, and so many of our memories, our moods, our ideas set out to voyage far away from us, until they are lost to sight! Then we can no longer make them enter into our reckoning of the total that is our personality. But they know of secret paths by which to return to us. And on certain nights, having gone to sleep almost without missing Albertine anymore—we can miss only what we remember—on awakening I found a whole fleet of memories that had come to cruise upon the surface of my clearest consciousness, and seemed marvelously

distinct. Then I wept over what I could see so plainly, what the previous evening had been to me nonexistent. In an instant, Albertine's name, her death, had changed their meaning; her betrayals had suddenly resumed their old importance.

How could she have seemed dead to me when now, in order to think of her, I had at my disposal only those same images one or other of which I used to recall when she was alive: rapid and bent over the mythological wheel of her bicycle, tightly strapped on rainy days in the warrior's tunic of her raincoat that made her breasts protrude, while serpents writhed in her turbaned hair, she scattered terror in the streets of Balbec; on the evenings on which we had taken champagne with us to the woods of Chantepie, her voice provocative and altered, her face suffused with that warm pallor, tinged with pink only on her cheekbones, which, unable to distinguish it in the darkness of the carriage, I drew into the moonlight to see it better, and which I tried now in vain to recapture, to see again in a darkness that would never end. A little statuette on the trip to the island in the Bois, a large, calm, coarsely grained face at the pianola, she was thus by turns rain-soaked and swift, provoking and diaphanous, motionless and smiling, an angel of music. Each was thus attached to a moment, to the date of which I found myself carried back when I saw again that particular Albertine. And these moments of the past do not remain immobile; they retain in our memory the motion that drew them toward the future, toward a future that has itself become the past, and draw us on in their train. Never had I caressed the waterproofed Albertine of the rainy days, I wanted to ask her to take off that armor, in order to experience with her the love of the tented field, the fraternity of travel. But this was no longer possible, she was dead. Never either, for fear of corrupting her, had I shown any sign of comprehension on the evenings when she seemed to be offering me pleasures that, but for my self-restraint, she would not perhaps have sought from others, and that aroused in me now a frantic desire. I would not have found them the same in any other woman, but I might scour the whole world now without encountering the woman who was willing to give them to me, for Albertine was dead. It seemed that I had to choose between two facts, to decide which was true, so far was the fact of Albertine's death—arising for me from a reality that I had not known, her life in Touraine—in contradiction of all my thoughts of her, my desires, my regrets, my tenderness, my rage, my jealousy. So great a wealth of memories, borrowed

from the treasury of her life, such a profusion of sentiments evoking, implicating her life, seemed to make it incredible that Albertine should be dead. Such a profusion of sentiments, for my memory, while preserving my affection, left it all its variety. It was not Albertine alone who was a succession of moments, it was also myself. My love for her had not been simple: to a curiosity about the unknown had been added a sensual desire and to a feeling of an almost conjugal sweetness, at one moment indifference, at another a jealous fury. I was not one man only, but the procession hour after hour of a composite army in which there appeared, according to the moment, impassioned men, indifferent men, jealous men—jealous men not one of whom was jealous of the same woman. And no doubt it would be from this that one day would come the healing that I would not want. In a composite mass, the elements may, one by one, without our noticing it, be replaced by others, which others again eliminate or reinforce, until in the end a change has been brought about that it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person. The complexity of my love, of my person, multiplied, diversified my sufferings. And yet they could still be ranged in the two categories whose alternation had made up the whole life of my love for Albertine, swayed alternately by trust and by jealous suspicion.

If I had found it difficult to imagine that Albertine, so alive in me (wearing as I did the double harness of the present and the past), was dead, perhaps it was equally paradoxical that this suspicion of the misdeeds of which Albertine, stripped now of the flesh that had enjoyed them, of the heart that had been able to desire them, was no longer capable, nor responsible for them, should excite in me such suffering that I would only have blessed if I had seen it as the token of the moral reality of a person materially nonexistent, instead of the reflection, destined itself too to fade, of impressions that she had made on me in the past. A woman who could no longer feel any pleasure with others ought not any longer to have excited my jealousy, if only my tenderness had been able to come to the surface. But this was just what was impossible, since it could not find its object, Albertine, except among memories in which she was still alive. Since, merely by thinking of her, I brought her back to life, her infidelities could never be those of a dead woman; the moments at which she had committed them becoming the present moment, not only for Albertine, but for that one of my various selves suddenly evoked who was thinking of her. So that no

anachronism could ever separate the indissoluble couple, in which, to each new culprit, was immediately mated a jealous lover, pitiable and always contemporaneous. I had, during the last months, kept her shut up in my own house. But in my imagination now, Albertine was free, she was abusing her freedom, was prostituting herself to one woman or to another. Formerly, I used constantly to think of the uncertain future that was spread out before us and endeavor to read its message. And now, what lay before me, like a counterpart of the future—as preoccupying as the future because it was equally uncertain, as difficult to decipher, as mysterious, crueller still because I did not have, as with the future, the possibility or the illusion of influencing it, and also because it would unfold itself to the full extent of my own life without my companion’s being present to soothe the anguish that it caused me—was no longer Albertine’s future, it was her past. Her past? That is the wrong word, since for jealousy there can be neither past nor future, and what it imagines is invariably the present.

Atmospheric changes, provoking other changes in the inner man, awaken forgotten selves, upset the lethargy of habit, restore their old force to certain memories, to certain sufferings. How much the more so with me if this change of weather recalled to me the weather in which Albertine, at Balbec, under the threat of rain, it might be, used to set out, heaven knows why, on long rides, in the clinging tunic of her raincoat! If she had lived, no doubt today, in this so similar weather, she would be setting out, in Touraine, upon a similar excursion. Since she could do so no longer, I ought not to have suffered from the thought; but, as with amputees, the slightest change in the weather revived my pains in the member that no longer existed.

Suddenly a recollection that had not come back to me for a long time—for it had remained dissolved in the fluid and invisible expanse of my memory—became crystallized. Many years ago, when somebody mentioned her bathrobe, Albertine had blushed. At that time I was not jealous of her. But since then I had intended to ask her if she could remember that conversation, and why she had blushed. This had preoccupied me all the more because I had been told that the two girls, Léa’s friends, frequented the bathing establishment of the hotel, and, it was said, not merely for the purpose of taking showers. But, for fear of annoying Albertine, or else awaiting some more opportune moment, I had always refrained from mentioning it to her and in time had ceased to think about it. And all of a sudden, sometime after Albertine’s death, I recalled

this memory, stamped with the character, at once irritating and solemn, of enigmas left forever insoluble by the death of the one person who could have shed some light on them. Might I not at least try to make certain that Albertine had never done anything wrong or even behaved suspiciously in that bathing establishment? By sending someone to Balbec I might perhaps succeed. While she was alive, I would doubtless have been unable to learn anything. But people's tongues become strangely loosened and they are ready to report a misdeed when they need no longer fear the culprit's resentment. As the constitution of our imagination, which has remained rudimentary, simplistic (not having passed through the countless transformations that improve upon the primitive models of human inventions, barely recognizable, whether it be the barometer, the balloon, the telephone, or anything else, in their ultimate perfection), allows us to see only a very few things at one time, the memory of the bathing establishment came to occupy the whole field of my inward vision.

Sometimes I collided in the dark lanes of sleep with one of those bad dreams, which are not very serious for several reasons, one of these being that the sadness that they engender lasts for barely an hour after we awake, like the malaise that is caused by an artificial soporific; for another reason also, namely that we encounter them but very rarely, no more than once in two or three years. And, moreover, it remains uncertain whether we have encountered them before, whether they have not rather that aspect of not being seen for the first time which is projected over them by an illusion, a subdivision (for duplication would not be a strong enough term).

Of course, since I entertained doubts about the life, the death of Albertine, I ought long since to have begun to make inquiries, but the same weariness, the same cowardice that had made me give way to Albertine when she was with me prevented me from undertaking anything since I had ceased to see her. And yet from a weakness that has dragged on for years on end, a flash of energy sometimes emerges. I decided to make, at least, this investigation, one that was only partial. One would have said that nothing else had occurred in Albertine's whole life.⁴⁷ I asked myself whom I could best send down to make inquiries on the spot, at Balbec. Aimé seemed to me to be a good choice. Apart from his thorough knowledge of the place, he belonged to that category of plebeian folk who have a keen eye to their own advantage, are loyal to those whom they serve, indifferent to any thought of morality, and of whom—because, if we pay them well, in their obedience to

our will, they suppress everything that might in one way or another go against it, showing themselves as incapable of indiscretion, indolence, or dishonesty as they are devoid of scruples—we say: “They are good fellows.” In such we can have absolute confidence. When Aimé had gone, I thought how much better it would have been if, instead of sending him down to try to discover something there, I had now been able to question Albertine herself. And at once the thought of this question that I would have liked to put, which it seemed to me that I was about to put to her, having brought Albertine to my side—not by dint of a conscious effort of resurrection but as though by one of those chance encounters which, as is the case with photographs that are not posed, with snapshots, always make the person appear more alive—at the same time as I imagined our conversation, I felt how impossible it was; I had just approached a new aspect of the idea that Albertine was dead, Albertine who inspired in me the tenderness that we have for those who are absent and the sight of whom does not come to correct the embellished image, inspiring also sorrow that this absence must be eternal and that the poor child should be deprived forever of the joys of life. And immediately, by an abrupt displacement, from the torments of jealousy I passed to the despair of separation.

What filled my heart now, instead of odious suspicions, was the affectionate memory of hours of confiding tenderness spent with the sister whom death had really made me lose, since my grief was related not to what Albertine had been to me, but to what my heart, eager to participate in the most general emotions of love, had gradually persuaded me that she was; then I became aware that the life that had bored me so—so, at least, I thought—had been on the contrary delicious, to the briefest moments spent in talking to her of things that were quite insignificant, I felt now that there was added, amalgamated, a pleasure that at the time had not—it is true—been perceived by me, but that was already the cause of my having sought those moments so persistently to the exclusion of any others; the most trivial incidents that I recalled, a movement that she had made when sitting by my side in the carriage, or sitting opposite me at the table in her room, dispersed through my heart a surge of sweetness and sorrow that little by little overwhelmed it altogether.

This room in which we used to dine had never seemed to me attractive; I had told Albertine that it was merely in order that she might be content to live in it. Now the curtains, the chairs, the books, had ceased to be a matter

of indifference to me. Art is not alone in imparting charm and mystery to the most insignificant things; pain also possesses the same power of bringing them into intimate relation with ourselves. At the time I had paid no attention to the dinner that we had eaten together after our return from the Bois, before I went to the Verdurins', and toward the beauty, the solemn sweetness of which I now turned, my eyes filled with tears. An impression of love is out of proportion to the other impressions of life, but it is not when it is lost in their midst that we can take account of it. It is not from below, in the tumult of the street and amid the throng of neighboring houses, it is when we have moved away from the slope of a neighboring hill, at a distance from which the whole town has disappeared or appears only as a confused mass at ground level, that we can, in the calm detachment of solitude and dusk, appreciate, unique, persistent and pure, the height of a cathedral. I tried to embrace the image of Albertine through my tears as I thought of all the serious and sensible things that she had said that evening. One morning I thought that I could see the oblong shape of a hill swathed in mist, that I could taste the warmth of a cup of chocolate, while my heart was horribly wrung by the memory of that afternoon on which Albertine had come to see me and I had kissed her for the first time: the fact was that I had just heard the hiccup of the hot-water system that had just been turned on. And I flung angrily away an invitation that Françoise brought me from Mme Verdurin. How much more forcibly the impression I had felt when I went to dine for the first time at La Raspelière, that death does not strike us all at the same age, overcame me with increased force now that Albertine had died so young, while Brichot continued to dine with Mme Verdurin who was still entertaining and would perhaps continue to entertain for many years to come! At once the name of Brichot recalled to me the end of that evening party when he had accompanied me home, when I had seen from the street the light of Albertine's lamp. I had already thought of it many times, but I had not approached this memory from the same angle. For if our memories do indeed belong to us, they do so after the fashion of those country properties that have little hidden gates of which we ourselves are often unaware, and which someone in the neighborhood opens for us, so that from one direction at least that is new to us, we find ourselves back in our own house.⁴⁸ Then when I thought of the void that I would now find upon returning home, when I realized that never again would I see from the street Albertine's room, that its light was extinguished forever, I

remembered how, that evening, on leaving Brichot, I had thought that I was bored, that I regretted my inability to stroll about the streets and make love elsewhere, I realized how greatly I had been mistaken, that it was only because the treasure whose reflections came down to me from above had seemed to be entirely in my possession that I had failed to appreciate its value, so that it appeared necessarily inferior to pleasures, however slight, of which however, in seeking to imagine them, I enhanced the value. I realized all the plenitude, the life, the sweetness that the light that had seemed to me to issue from a prison had contained for me, all of which was but the realization of what had for a moment intoxicated me and had then seemed forever impossible: I began to understand that this life that I had led in Paris in a home that was also her home, was precisely the realization of that profound peace of which I had dreamed on the night when Albertine had slept under the same roof as me, at Balbec.⁴⁹

The conversation that I had had with Albertine after our return from the Bois before that party at the Verdurins', had it never occurred, I would not have been consoled, that conversation which had to some extent introduced Albertine into my intellectual life and in certain respects had made us one. For no doubt if I returned with melting affection to her intelligence, to her kindness to me, it was not because they were any greater than those of other persons whom I had known; had not Mme de Cambremer said to me at Balbec: "What! You could be spending your days with Elstir, who is a genius, and you spend them with your cousin!" Albertine's intelligence pleased me because, by association, it revived in me what I called its sweetness as we call the sweetness of a fruit a certain sensation that exists only in our palate. And in fact, when I thought of Albertine's intelligence, my lips instinctively protruded and tasted a memory of which I preferred that the reality should remain external to me and should consist in the objective superiority of a person. There could be no denying that I had known people whose intelligence was greater. But the infinitude of love, or its egoism, has the result that the people whom we love are those whose intellectual and moral physiognomy is least objectively defined in our eyes, we alter them incessantly to suit our desires and fears, we do not separate them from ourselves: they are only a vast and vague terrain in which our affections take root. We do not have of our own body, into which flow perpetually so many anxieties and pleasures, as clear an outline as we have of a tree or house, or of a passerby. And where I had been wrong was

perhaps in not making a greater effort to know Albertine in herself. Just as, from the point of view of her charm, I had long considered only the different positions that she occupied in my memory in the procession of years, and had been surprised to see that she had been spontaneously enriched with modifications that were not due merely to the difference of perspective, so I ought to have sought to understand her character as that of an ordinary person, and thus perhaps, finding an explanation of her persistence in keeping her secret from me, might have avoided prolonging between her strange obstinacy and my constant misgiving, that conflict that had led to the death of Albertine. And I then felt, with an intense pity for her, shame at having survived her. It seemed to me indeed, in the hours when I suffered least, that I had somehow benefited from her death, for a woman is of greater service to our life if she is, instead of being an element of happiness in it, an instrument of sorrow, and there is not a woman in the world the possession of whom is as precious as that of the truths that she reveals to us by causing us to suffer. In these moments, thinking at once of my grandmother's death and of Albertine's, it seemed to me that my life was stained with a double murder from which only the cowardice of the world could absolve me. I had dreamed of being understood by Albertine, of not being misjudged by her, thinking that it was for the great happiness of being understood, of not being misjudged, when so many other people might have served me better. We want to be understood, because we want to be loved, and we want to be loved because we are in love. The understanding of other people is a matter of indifference to us and their love importunate. My joy at having possessed a little of Albertine's intelligence and of her heart arose not from their intrinsic worth, but from the fact that this possession was a stage further toward the complete possession of Albertine, a possession that had been my goal and my fantasy ever since the day when I first set eyes on her. When we speak of the "kindness" of a woman, we do no more perhaps than project outside ourselves the pleasure that we feel in seeing her, like children when they say: "My dear little bed, my dear little pillow, my dear little hawthorns."⁵⁰ Which explains, incidentally, why men never say of a woman who is not unfaithful to them: "She is so kind," and say it so often of a woman by whom they are betrayed. Mme de Cambremer was right in thinking that Elstir's intellectual charm was greater. But we cannot judge in the same way the charm of a person who is, like everyone else, external to ourselves, painted upon the

horizon of our mind, and that of a person who, in consequence of an error in localization that has been due to certain accidents but is tenacious, has lodged herself in our own body to the point where asking ourselves retrospectively whether or not she looked at a woman on a particular day in the corridor of a little seaside train causes the same pain as would a surgeon probing for a bullet in our heart. A simple croissant, but one that we are eating, gives us more pleasure than all the ortolans, young rabbits, and partridges that were set before Louis XV, and the blade of grass that, a few inches away, quivers before our eye, while we are lying on the mountainside, may conceal from us the vertiginous summit of another peak, if the latter is several miles away. Furthermore, our mistake is not in valuing the intelligence, the kindness of a woman whom we love, however slight they may be. Our mistake is our remaining indifferent to the kindness, the intelligence of others. Falsehood begins to cause us the indignation, and kindness the gratitude, which they ought always to arouse in us, only if they come from a woman with whom we are in love, and physical desire has the marvelous power of giving intelligence its value and moral life a solid base. Never would I find again that divine thing, a person with whom I could talk freely of everything, in whom I could confide. Confide? But did not other people offer me greater confidence than Albertine? Had I not had with others more extensive conversations? The fact is that confidence and conversation are trivial things in themselves, what does it matter whether they are more or less imperfect, if only there enters into them love, which alone is divine? I could see Albertine now, seated at her pianola, rosy beneath her dark hair, I could feel, against my lips that she was trying to part, her tongue, her maternal, inedible, nourishing, and holy tongue whose secret flame and dew meant that even when Albertine merely let it glide over the surface of my neck or stomach, those caresses, superficial but in a sense offered by her inmost flesh, exteriorized like a cloth that shows its lining, assumed even in the most external touches as it were the mysterious sweetness of a penetration.

All these so pleasant moments that nothing would ever restore to me again, I cannot indeed say that what made me feel the loss of them was despair. To feel despair, we must still be attached to that life that can no longer be anything but unhappy. I had been in despair at Balbec when I saw the day break and realized that none of the days to come could ever be a happy one for me, I had remained just as selfish since then, but the self to

which I was now attached, the self that constituted those vital reserves that set in action the instinct of self-preservation, this self was no longer alive; when I thought of my strength, of my vital force, of the best that was in me, I thought of a certain treasure that I had possessed (that I had been alone in possessing since others could not know exactly the feeling, concealed in me, that it had inspired in me) and that no one could ever again take from me since I possessed it no longer. And, to tell the truth, when I had only ever possessed it because I had liked to imagine myself as possessing it. I had not merely committed the imprudence, in looking at Albertine with my lips and lodging her in my heart, of making her live within me, and that other imprudence of combining a familial affection with sensual pleasure. I had sought also to persuade myself that our relations were love, that we were mutually practicing the relations that are called love, because she obediently returned the kisses that I gave her, and, having acquired the habit of believing this, I had lost not merely a woman whom I loved but a woman who loved me, my sister, my child, my tender mistress. And in short, I had known a happiness and a misfortune that Swann had not known, for after all during the whole of the time in which he had been in love with Odette and had been so jealous of her, he had barely seen her, having found it so difficult, on certain days when she put him off at the last moment, to gain admission to her. But afterward he had had her to himself, as his wife, and until the day of his death. I, on the contrary, while I was so jealous of Albertine, more fortunate than Swann, had had her with me in my own house. I had actually attained what Swann had so often dreamed of and that he did not experience until it had become a matter of indifference to him. But, after all, I had not managed to keep Albertine as he had kept Odette. She had fled from me, she was dead. For nothing ever repeats itself exactly, and the most analogous lives that, thanks to the kinship of character and the similarity of circumstances, we may select in order to represent them as symmetrical, remain in many respects opposite. By losing my life I would not have lost very much; I would have lost now only an empty form, the empty frame of a work of art. Indifferent as to what I might henceforth put into it, but happy and proud to think of what it had contained, I dwelt upon the memory of those so pleasant hours, and this moral support gave me a feeling of comfort that the approach of death itself would not have disturbed.

How she used to hasten to see me at Balbec when I sent for her, lingering only to sprinkle scent on her hair to please me! These images of Balbec and Paris that I loved to see thus were the pages still so recent, and so quickly turned, of her short life. All this, which for me was only memory, had been for her action, action as precipitate as that of a tragedy toward a swift death. People develop in one way inside us, but in another way outside us (I had indeed felt this on those evenings when I remarked in Albertine an enrichment of qualities that was due not only to my memory), and these two ways never cease reacting upon each other. Although I had, in seeking to know Albertine, then to possess her entirely, obeyed merely the need to reduce by experiment to elements meanly similar to those of our own self the mystery of every other person, I had been unable to do so without exercising an influence in my turn over Albertine's life. Perhaps my wealth, the prospect of a brilliant marriage had attracted her, my jealousy had kept her, her goodness or her intelligence, or her sense of guilt, or her skillful cunning had made her accept, and had led me to make harsher and harsher a captivity in chains forged simply by the internal development of my mental toil, which had nonetheless had, upon Albertine's life, repercussions, destined themselves to pose, by a natural backlash, new and ever more painful problems to my psychology, since from my prison she had escaped to go and kill herself on a horse that but for me she would not have owned,⁵¹ leaving me, even after she was dead, with suspicions the verification of which, if it was to come, would perhaps be more painful to me than the discovery at Balbec that Albertine had known Mlle Vinteuil, since Albertine would no longer be present to soothe me. So that the long plaint of the soul that thinks it is living shut up within itself is a monologue in appearance only, since the echoes of reality alter its course and such a life is like an essay in subjective psychology spontaneously pursued but furnishing from a distance the "plot" for the purely realistic novel of another reality, another existence, the vicissitudes of which come in their turn to inflect the curve and change the direction of the psychological essay. How highly geared had been the mechanism, how rapid had been the evolution of our love, and, notwithstanding the sundry delays, interruptions and hesitations at the start, as in certain of Balzac's tales or Schumann's ballades,⁵² how sudden the dénouement! It was in the course of this last year, long as a century to me, so many times had Albertine changed her position in my thoughts between Balbec and her departure from Paris, and

also, independently of me and often without my knowledge, changed in herself, that I had to place the whole of that happy life of affection that had lasted so short a while, which yet appeared to me with a plenitude, almost an immensity, that now was forever impossible and yet was indispensable to me. Indispensable without perhaps having been in itself and at the outset a thing that was necessary since I would not have known Albertine had I not read in an archaeological treatise a description of the church at Balbec, had not Swann, by telling me that this church was almost Persian, directed my taste to the Byzantine Norman, had not a financial syndicate, by erecting at Balbec a hygienic and comfortable hotel, made my parents decide to grant my wish and send me to Balbec. To be sure, in that Balbec so long desired I had not found the Persian church of my dreams, nor the eternal mists. Even the famous 1:22⁵³ had not corresponded to my mental picture of it. But in exchange for what our imagination leaves us wanting and we give ourselves so much unnecessary trouble in trying to find, life does give us something that we were very far from imagining. Who would have told me at Combray, when I lay waiting for my mother's goodnight with so heavy a heart, that those anxieties would be healed, and would then break out again one day, not for my mother, but for a girl who would at first be no more, against the horizon of the sea, than a flower upon which my eyes would daily be invited to gaze, but a flower that could think, and in whose mind I would be so childishly anxious to occupy a prominent place that I would be distressed by her not being aware that I knew Mme de Villeparisis? Yes, it was for the goodnight kiss of such an unknown girl that, in years to come, I was to suffer as intensely as I had suffered as a child when my mother did not come up to my room. And yet this Albertine who had become so necessary, of love for whom my soul was now almost exclusively composed, if Swann had not spoken to me of Balbec, I would never have known her. Her life would perhaps have been longer, mine would have been deprived of what was now making it a martyrdom. And thus it seemed to me that, by my entirely selfish affection, I had allowed Albertine to die just as I had murdered my grandmother.⁵⁴ Even later on, even after I had already got to know her at Balbec, it is possible that I might not have loved her as I eventually did. For when I gave up Gilberte and knew that I might one day love another woman, I hardly dared to entertain a doubt as to whether, considering simply the past, I could have loved anyone else other than Gilberte. Now regarding Albertine, I no longer had any

doubt at all, I was sure that it need not have been her that I loved, that it might have been someone else. To prove this, it would have sufficed that Mlle de Stermaria, on the evening when I was going to take her to dine on the island in the Bois, should not have canceled the rendezvous. It was still not too late, and it would have been upon Mlle de Stermaria that I would have trained that activity of the imagination that makes us extract from a woman so special a notion of the individual that she appears to us unique in herself and predestined and necessary for us.⁵⁵ At the most, adopting an almost physiological point of view, I could say that I might have been able to feel this same exclusive love for another woman but not for any other woman. For Albertine, plump and brunette, did not resemble Gilberte, slim and redheaded, and yet they were fashioned of the same healthy stuff, and above the same sensual cheeks shone a look in the eyes of both that it was difficult to interpret. They were women of a sort that would never attract the attention of men who, for their part, would do the most extravagant things for other women who “meant nothing” to me. A man has almost always the same way of catching cold, of falling ill, that is to say, he requires for that a certain combination of circumstances; it is natural that when he falls in love he should love a certain type of woman, a type that, moreover, is very numerous. The first glances from Albertine that had set me dreaming were not absolutely different from Gilberte’s first glances. I could almost believe that the obscure personality, the sensuality, the willful, cunning nature of Gilberte had returned to tempt me, incarnate this time in Albertine’s body, a body quite different and yet not without analogies. In Albertine’s case, thanks to a wholly different life shared with me into which no fissure of distraction and obliviousness had been able to penetrate a block of thoughts in which a painful preoccupation maintained a permanent cohesion, her living body had indeed not, like Gilberte’s, ceased one day to be the body in which I found what I subsequently recognized as being to me (what they would not have been to other men) feminine charms. But she was dead. I would forget her. Who then could say whether the same qualities of rich blood, of uneasy brooding would return one day to create turmoil in me? But incarnate this time in what feminine form I could not foretell. The example of Gilberte would as little have enabled me to form an idea of Albertine and guess that I would fall in love with her, as the memory of Vinteuil’s sonata would have enabled me to imagine his septet. Indeed, what was more, on the first few times that I had seen Albertine, I might

have supposed that it was with other girls that I would fall in love. Besides, she might even have appeared to me, had I met her a year earlier, as dull as a gray sky in which dawn has not yet broken. If I had changed in relation to her, she herself had changed also, and the girl who had come and sat on my bed on the day of my letter to Mlle de Stermaria⁵⁶ was no longer the same girl that I had known at Balbec, whether by a simple explosion of womanhood that occurs at the age of puberty, or because of a set of circumstances that I have never been able to discover. In any case even if the girl I was one day to love must to a certain extent resemble her, that is to say if my choice of a woman was not entirely free, this meant nevertheless that, directed in a manner that was perhaps inevitable, it was directed toward something more considerable than an individual, toward a type of woman, and this removed all inevitability from my love for Albertine. The woman whose face we have before our eyes more constantly than light itself, since even when our eyes are shut, we never cease for an instant to adore her beautiful eyes, her beautiful nose, to arrange opportunities of seeing them again, this unique woman—we know quite well that it would have been another woman that would now be unique to us if we had been in another town than in the one where we made her acquaintance, if we had explored other quarters of the town, if we had frequented a different salon. Unique, we suppose? She is innumerable. And yet she is compact, indestructible in our loving eyes, irreplaceable for a long time to come by any other. The truth is that this woman has simply raised to life by a sort of magic spell a thousand elements of tenderness existing in us already in a fragmentary state, which she has assembled, joined together, bridging every gap between them, it is ourselves who by giving her her features have supplied all the solid matter of the beloved object. Whence it comes about that even if we are only one man among a thousand to her and perhaps the last man of them all, to us she is the only one, the one toward whom our whole life tends. It was indeed true that I had been well aware that this love was not inevitable since it might have occurred with Mlle de Stermaria, but, even without that, from my knowledge of love itself, when I found it to be too similar to what I had known with other women, and also when I felt it to be vaster than Albertine, enveloping her, unconscious of her, like a tide swirling round a tiny rock. But gradually, by dint of living with Albertine, I was no longer able to fling off the chains that I myself had forged; the habit of associating Albertine's person with the sentiment that she had not

inspired made me nevertheless believe that it was peculiar to her, as habit gives to the mere association of ideas between two phenomena, according to a certain school of philosophy, the illusory force and necessity of a law of causation. I had thought that my social relations, my wealth, would dispense me from suffering, and too effectively perhaps since this seemed to dispense me from feeling, loving, imagining; I envied a poor country girl whom the absence of connections, even by telegraph, allows to daydream for months on end about a sorrow that she cannot artificially put to sleep. And now I began to realize that if, in the case of Mme de Guermantes, endowed with everything that could make the gulf infinite between her and myself, I had seen that gulf suddenly bridged by the opinion that social advantages are nothing more than inert and transmutable matter, so, in a similar albeit converse fashion, my social relations, my wealth, all the material means by which not only my own position but the civilization of my age enabled me to profit, had done no more than postpone the conclusion of my struggle against the contrary, inflexible will of Albertine upon which no pressure had had any effect. True, I had been able to exchange telegrams, telephone messages with Saint-Loup, to remain in constant communication with the post office at Tours, but had not the delay in waiting for them proved useless, the result nil? And country girls, without social advantages or connections, or human beings before these improvements of civilization, do they not suffer less, because all of us desire less, because we regret less what we have always known to be inaccessible, what for that reason has continued to seem unreal? We desire more keenly the person who has yet to give herself to us; hope anticipates possession; but regret also is an amplifier of desire. Mlle de Stermaria's refusal to come and dine with me on the island in the Bois was what had prevented her from becoming the object of my love. This might have sufficed also to make me fall in love with her if afterward I had seen her again in time. As soon as I had known that she was not coming, entertaining the improbable hypothesis—which had been proved correct—that perhaps she had a jealous lover who prevented her from seeing other men, that I would never see her again, I had suffered so intensely that I would have given anything in the world to see her, and it was one of the greatest anguishes that I had ever felt that Saint-Loup's arrival had soothed.⁵⁷ But after we have reached a certain age, our loves, our mistresses, are begotten of our anguish; our past, and the physical lesions in which it is recorded,

determine our future. In Albertine's case, in particular, the fact that it would not necessarily be she whom I would love was, even without the example of those similar loves, inscribed in the history of my love for her, that is to say for herself and her friends. For it was not a love like my love for Gilberte but was created by division among a number of girls. It was possibly on her account and because they appeared to me more or less similar to her that I had found her friends attractive. The fact remains that for a long time it was possible for me to hesitate among them all, my choice strayed from one to another, and when I thought that I preferred one, it was enough that another should keep me waiting, should refuse to see me, to make me feel the first premonitions of love for her. Often at that time when Andrée was coming to see me at Balbec, if, shortly before Andrée was expected, Albertine failed to keep a rendezvous, my heart throbbed without ceasing, I felt that I would never see her again and that it was she whom I loved. And when Andrée came it was in all seriousness that I said to her (as I said it to her in Paris after I had learned that Albertine had known Mlle Vinteuil) what she supposed me to be saying deliberately, insincerely, what I would indeed have said thus and in the same words had I been happy the day before with Albertine: "Alas! If you had only come sooner, now I am in love with someone else." Again, in this case of Andrée, replaced by Albertine after I learned that the latter had known Mlle Vinteuil, my love had alternated between them, so that after all there had been only one love at a time. But there had been earlier cases where I had more or less fallen out with two of the girls. The one who took the first step toward a reconciliation would restore my peace of mind, it was the other that I would love, if she remained cross with me, which does not mean that it was not with the first that I would form a definite tie, for she would console me—although ineffectively—for the harshness of the other, whom I would end by forgetting if she did not return to me. Now, it so happened that, while I was convinced that one or the other at least would come back to me, for some time neither of them did so. My anguish was therefore twofold, and twofold my love, while reserving the right to cease to love the one who came back, but until that happened continued to suffer on account of them both. It is the lot of a certain period in life, which may come to us quite early, that we are made less amorous by a person than by a desertion, in which we end by knowing one thing and one thing only about that person, her face having grown dim, her soul nonexistent, our preference being quite recent and inexplicable;

namely that what we need to make our suffering cease is a message from her: "May I come and see you?" My separation from Albertine on the day when Françoise informed me: "Mademoiselle Albertine has gone" was like an allegory of countless other separations. For very often in order that we may discover that we are in love, perhaps indeed in order that we may fall in love, the day of separation must first have come.

In these cases when it is an unkept appointment, a written refusal that dictates our choice, our imagination lashed by suffering sets about its work so swiftly, fashions with so frenzied a rapidity a love that had scarcely begun, and had been quite featureless, destined, for months past, to remain a rough sketch, that now and again our intelligence that has not been able to keep pace with our heart, cries out in astonishment: "But you must be mad, what are these strange thoughts that are making you so miserable? None of this is real life." And indeed at that moment, if the betrayer has not contacted us again, a few healthy distractions that would calm our heart physically would be sufficient to bring our love to an end. In any case, if this life with Albertine was not, in its essence, necessary, it had become indispensable to me. I had trembled when I was in love with Mme de Guermantes because I used to say to myself that, with her too abundant means of seduction, not only beauty but position, wealth, she would be too much at liberty to give herself to too many people, that I would have too little hold over her. Albertine, being penniless and obscure, must have been anxious to marry me. And yet I had not been able to possess her exclusively. Whatever our social position, however wise our precautions, when the truth is confessed we have no hold over the life of another person. Why had she not said to me: "I have those tastes"? I would have yielded, would have allowed her to gratify them. In a novel that I had read there was a woman whom no objurgation from the man who was in love with her could induce to speak. When I read the book, I had thought this situation absurd; had I been the hero, I assured myself, I would first of all have forced the woman to speak, then we could have come to an understanding. What was the good of all this unnecessary misery? But I saw now that we are not free to refrain from forging the chains of our own misery, and that however well we may know our own will, other people do not obey it. And yet those painful, those ineluctable truths that dominated us and to which we were blind, the truth of our feelings, the truth of our destiny, how often without knowing it, without meaning it, had we expressed them in words

that we ourselves doubtless thought were mendacious, but the prophetic value of which has been established by subsequent events. I remembered many words that each of us had uttered without knowing at the time the truth that they contained, which indeed we had said thinking that each was deceiving the other, words the falsehood of which was very slight, very uninteresting, wholly confined within our pitiable insincerity, compared with what they contained that was unknown to us. Lies, mistakes, falling short of the profound reality that neither of us perceived, truth extending beyond it, the truth of our natures, the essential laws of which escape us and require Time before they reveal themselves, the truth of our destinies also. I had supposed that I was lying when I said to her at Balbec: "The more I see you, the more I will love you" (and yet it was that intimacy at every moment that had, through the channel of jealousy, attached me so strongly to her), "I feel that I could be of use to you intellectually"; and in Paris: "Do be careful. Remember that if you met with an accident, it would break my heart." And she: "But I may meet with an accident"; and I in Paris on the evening when I pretended that I wished to leave her: "Let me look at you once again since presently I will not be seeing you again, and it will be forever!" and when, that same evening, she looked around the room: "To think that I will never see this room again, those books, that pianola, the whole house, I cannot believe it and yet it is true." In her last letters again, when she had written—probably saying to herself: "This is all nonsense"—"I leave you the best of myself" (and was it not now indeed to the fidelity, to the strength, which too was, alas, frail, of my memory that were entrusted her intelligence, her kindness, her beauty?) and: "that twofold twilight (since night was falling and we were about to part) will be effaced from my thoughts only when the darkness is complete," that sentence written on the eve of the day when her mind had indeed been plunged into complete darkness, and when perhaps in those last glimmers, so brief but stretched out to infinity by the anxiety of the moment, she had indeed perhaps recalled our last drive together and in that instant when everything forsakes us and we create a faith for ourselves, as atheists turn Christian on the battlefield, she had perhaps summoned to her aid the friend whom she had so often cursed but had so deeply respected, who himself—for all religions are alike—was so cruel as to hope that she had also had time to see herself as she was, to give her last thought to him, to confess her sins finally to him, to die in him. But to what purpose, since even if, at that

moment, she had had time to see herself as she was, we had both of us understood where our happiness lay, what we ought to do, only when, only because that happiness was no longer possible, when and because we could no longer do it—whether it be that, so long as things are possible, we postpone them, or that they cannot assume that force of attraction, that apparent ease of realization except when, projected onto the ideal void of the imagination, they are removed from their deadening and degrading submersion in physical being. The thought that we must die is more painful than the act of dying, but less painful than the thought that another person is dead, that, becoming once more a plane surface after having engulfed a person, a reality extends, without even a ripple at the point of disappearance, from which that person is excluded, in which there exists no longer any will, any knowledge, and from which it is as difficult to reascend to the idea that the person has lived, as it is difficult, with the still recent memory of her life, to think that she is now comparable with the insubstantial images, with the memories left us by the characters in a novel that we have been reading.

At any rate I was glad that, before she died, she had written me that letter, and above all had sent me the final message that proved to me that she would have returned had she lived. It seemed to me that it was not merely more soothing, but more beautiful also, that the event would have been incomplete without this telegram, would not have had so markedly the form of art and destiny. In reality it would have been just as markedly so had it been different; for every event is like a mold of a particular shape, and, whatever it may be, it imposes, upon the series of incidents that it has interrupted and seems to have concluded, a pattern that we believe to be the only one possible, because we do not know the other that might have been substituted for it. I repeated to myself: “Why had she not said to me: ‘I have those tastes’? I would have yielded, would have allowed her to gratify them; at this moment I would be kissing her still.” How sad to have to remind myself that she had lied to me thus when she swore to me, three days before she left me, that she had never had with Mlle Vinteuil’s friend those relations that at the moment when Albertine swore it her blush had confessed! Poor child, she had at least had the honesty to refuse to swear that the pleasure of seeing Mlle Vinteuil again had no part in her desire to go that day to the Verdurins’. Why had she not made her admission complete, why had she then invented that inconceivable tale? Perhaps

however it was partly my fault that she had never, despite all my entreaties that were powerless against her denial, been willing to say to me: "I have those tastes." It was perhaps partly my fault because at Balbec, on the day when, after Mme de Cambremer's visit, I had had my first argument with Albertine, and when I was so far from imagining that she could have had, in any case, anything more than an unduly passionate friendship with Andrée, I had expressed with undue violence my disgust at that kind of moral lapse, had condemned it in too categorical a fashion. I could not recall whether Albertine had blushed when I had naïvely expressed my horror of that sort of thing, I could not recall it, for it is often only long afterward that we would give anything to know what attitude a person adopted at a moment when we were paying no attention to it, an attitude that, later on, when we think again of our conversation, would elucidate a poignant difficulty. But in our memory there is a blank, there is no trace of it. And very often we have not paid sufficient attention, at the actual moment, to the things that might even then have seemed to us important, we have not accurately heard a sentence, have not noticed a gesture, or else we have forgotten them. And when later on, eager to discover a truth, we reascend from deduction to deduction, leafing through our memory like a sheaf of written evidence, when we arrive at that sentence, at that gesture, that it is impossible to remember, we begin again a score of times the same process, but in vain: the road goes no farther. Had she blushed? I did not know whether she had blushed, but she could not have failed to hear, and the memory of my words had brought her to a halt later on when perhaps she had been on the point of making her confession to me. And now she no longer existed anywhere, I might scour the earth from pole to pole without finding Albertine; reality that had closed over her was once more unbroken, had obliterated every trace of the creature who had sunk into its depths. She was no more now than a name, like that Mme de Charlus of whom the people who had known her said with indifference: "She was charming." But I was unable to conceive for more than an instant the existence of this reality of which Albertine had no knowledge, for in me my mistress existed too vividly, in me whose every feeling, every thought related to her life. Perhaps if she had known, she would have been touched to see that her lover had not forgotten her, now that her own life was finished, and would have been moved by things that in the past had left her indifferent. But as we would choose to refrain from infidelities, however secret they might be, so fearful are we

that she whom we love is not refraining from them, I was alarmed by the thought that if the dead do exist somewhere, my grandmother was as well aware of my oblivion as Albertine of my remembrance. And when all is said, even in the case of a single dead person, can we be sure that the joy that we would feel in learning that she knows certain things would compensate for our alarm at the thought that she knows them *all*; and, however agonizing the sacrifice, would we not sometimes abstain from keeping after their death as friends those whom we have loved, for fear of having them also as judges?

My jealous curiosity as to what Albertine might have done was unbounded. I suborned any number of women from whom I learned nothing. If this curiosity was so keen, it was because people do not die at once for us, they remain bathed in a sort of *aura* of life in which there is no true immortality, but which means that they continue to occupy our thoughts in the same way as when they were alive. It is as though they were traveling abroad. This is a thoroughly pagan survival. Conversely, when we have ceased to love her, the curiosity that the person arouses dies before she herself is dead. Thus I would no longer have taken a single step to find out with whom Gilberte had been strolling on a certain evening in the Champs-Élysées.⁵⁸ Now I was well aware that these two forms of curiosities were absolutely alike, had no value in themselves, were incapable of lasting. But I continued to sacrifice everything to the cruel satisfaction of this transient curiosity, although I knew in advance that my enforced separation from Albertine, by the fact of her death, would lead me to the same indifference as had resulted from my voluntary separation from Gilberte. If she could have known what was about to happen, she would have stayed with me. But this meant no more than that, once she saw herself dead, she would have preferred, in my company, to remain alive. Simply in view of the contradiction that it implied, such a supposition was absurd. But it was not innocuous, for in imagining how glad Albertine would be, if she could know, if she could retrospectively understand, to come back to me, I saw her before me, I wanted to kiss her; and alas, it was impossible, she would never come back, she was dead. My imagination sought for her in the sky, through the nights on which we had gazed at it when still together; beyond that moonlight that she loved, I tried to raise up to her my affection so that it might be a consolation to her for being no longer alive, and this love for a being so remote was like a religion, my thoughts rose toward her like

prayers. Desire is very powerful, it engenders belief; I had believed that Albertine would not leave me because I desired that she might not; because I desired it, I believed that she was not dead; I took to reading books on table-turning, I began to believe in the possibility of the immortality of the soul. But that did not suffice me. I required that, after my own death, I should find her again in her body, as though eternity were like life. Life, did I say! I was more exacting still. I would have wished not to be deprived forever by death of the pleasures of which however it is not alone in robbing us. For without her death they would eventually have grown faint, they had begun already to do so by the action of long-established habit, of new curiosities. Besides, had she been alive, Albertine, even physically, would gradually have changed, day by day I would have adapted myself to that change. But my memory, calling up only detached moments of her life, asked to see her again as she would already have ceased to be, had she lived; what it required was a miracle that would satisfy the natural and arbitrary limitations of memory, which cannot emerge from the past. And yet, with the naïveté of the old theologians, I imagined this living creature furnishing me not indeed with the explanations that she might possibly have given me but, by a final contradiction, with those that she had always refused me during her life. And thus, her death being a sort of dream, my love would seem to her an unlooked-for happiness; I saw in death only the convenience and optimism of a *dénouement* that simplifies, that settles everything.

Sometimes it was not so far off, it was not in another world that I imagined our reunion. Just as in the past, when I knew Gilberte only from playing with her in the Champs-Élysées, at home in the evening I used to imagine that I was going to receive a letter from her in which she would confess her love for me, that she was about to come into the room, so a similar force of desire, no more perturbed by the laws of nature that ran counter to it than on the former occasion in the case of Gilberte, when after all it had not been mistaken since it had had the last word, made me think now that I was going to receive a message from Albertine, informing me that she had indeed had an accident while riding, but that for romantic reasons (and as, after all, has sometimes happened with people whom we have long believed to be dead) she had not wanted me to hear of her recovery and now, repentant, asked to be allowed to come and live with me forever. And, making me indeed understand the nature of certain harmless

manias in people who otherwise appear sane, I felt coexisting in me the certainty that she was dead and the incessant hope that I might see her come into the room.

I had not yet received any news from Aimé, although he must by now have reached Balbec. No doubt my inquiry turned upon a secondary point, and one quite arbitrarily selected. If Albertine's life had been really culpable, it must have contained many other things of far greater importance, which chance had not allowed me to look into, as it had in that conversation about the bathrobe, thanks to Albertine's blushes. But precisely those things did not exist for me since I had not seen them. But it was quite arbitrarily that I had hit upon that particular day, which several years later I was trying to reconstruct. If Albertine had been a lover of women, there were thousands of other days in her life that I did not know how she had spent and about which it might be as interesting for me to learn; I might have sent Aimé to many other places in Balbec, to many other towns than Balbec. But these other days, precisely because I did not know how she had spent them, did not present themselves to my imagination, they had no existence. Things and people did not begin to exist for me until they assumed in my imagination an individual existence. If there were thousands of others like them, they became for me representative of all the rest. If I had long felt a desire to know, in the matter of my suspicions with regard to Albertine, what exactly had happened in the baths, it was in the same manner in which, in the matter of my desires for women, and although I knew that there were any number of girls and lady's maids who could satisfy them and whom chance might just as easily have led me to hear about, I wanted to know—since it was of them that Saint-Loup had spoken to me—the girl who frequented houses of ill fame and Mme Putbus's maid. The difficulties that my health, my indecision, my “procrastination,” as Saint-Loup called it,⁵⁹ placed in the way of my carrying out any project, had made me put off from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, the elucidation of certain suspicions as well as the accomplishment of certain desires. But I kept them in my memory promising myself that I would not forget to learn the truth of them, because they alone obsessed me (since the others had no form in my eyes, did not exist), and also because the very happenstance that had chosen them out of the surrounding reality gave me a guarantee that it was indeed in them that I would come in contact with a trace of reality, of the true and coveted life.

Besides, is not a single little fact, if it is well chosen, sufficient to enable the experimenter to deduce a general law that will reveal the truth about thousands of analogous facts? Albertine might indeed exist in my memory only in the state in which she had successively appeared to me in the course of her life, that is to say subdivided according to a series of fractions of time, but my mind, reestablishing unity in her, made her a single person, and it was on this person that I sought to bring a general judgment to bear, to know whether she had lied to me, whether she loved women, whether it was in order to be free to associate with them that she had left me. What the woman in the baths would have to say might perhaps put an end forever to my doubts as to Albertine's morals.

My doubts! Alas, I had supposed that it would be immaterial to me, even agreeable, not to see Albertine again, until her departure revealed to me my error. Similarly, her death had shown me how greatly I had been mistaken when I believed that I hoped at times for her death and supposed that it would be my deliverance. So it was that, when I received Aimé's letter, I realized that, if I had not until then suffered too painfully from my doubts as to Albertine's virtue, it was because in reality they were not doubts at all. My happiness, my life required that Albertine should be virtuous, they had laid it down once and for all that she was. Armed with this protective belief, I could without danger allow my mind to play sadly with suppositions to which it gave a form but gave no credence. I said to myself, "She is perhaps a woman-lover," as we say, "I may die tonight"; we say it, but we do not believe it, we make plans for the following day. This explains why, believing mistakenly that I was uncertain whether Albertine did or did not love women, and believing in consequence that a proof of Albertine's guilt would not tell me anything that I had not already envisaged, I felt before the images, insignificant to anyone else, which Aimé's letter evoked for me, an unexpected anguish, the most painful that I had ever yet felt, and one that formed with those images, with the image, alas! of Albertine herself, a sort of precipitate, as they say in chemistry, in which the whole was indivisible and of which the text of Aimé's letter, which I isolate in a purely conventional fashion, can give no idea whatsoever, since each of the words that compose it was immediately transformed, colored forever by the suffering that it had just aroused.

Monsieur,

Monsieur will kindly forgive me for not having written sooner to Monsieur. The person whom Monsieur instructed me to see had gone away for two days, and, anxious to justify the confidence that Monsieur had placed in me, I did not wish to return empty-handed. I have just spoken at last to this person who remembers (Mlle A) quite well.

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Aimé who possessed certain rudiments of culture meant to put Mlle A in italics or between inverted commas. But when he meant to put inverted commas he put brackets, and when he meant to put something in brackets he put it between inverted commas. Thus it was that Françoise would say that someone *stayed* in my street meaning that he *dwelled* there, and that one could *dwell* for a few minutes, meaning *stay*, the mistakes of popular speech consisting merely, as often as not, in interchanging—as for that matter the French language has done—terms that in the course of centuries have replaced one another.

According to her the thing that Monsieur supposed is absolutely certain. For one thing, it was she who looked after (Mlle A) whenever she came to the baths. (Mlle A) came very often to take her shower with a tall woman older than herself, always dressed in gray, whom the shower attendant without knowing her name recognized from having often seen her going after girls. But she took no notice of any of them after she met (Mlle A). She and (Mlle A) always shut themselves up in the cabin, remained there a very long time, and the lady in gray used to give at least 10 francs as a tip to the person to whom I spoke. As this person said to me, you can imagine that if they were just stringing beads, they wouldn't have given a tip of ten francs. (Mlle A) used to come also sometimes with a woman with a very dark skin and a lorgnette. But (Mlle A) came most often with girls younger than herself, especially one with very red hair. Apart from the lady in gray, the people whom (Mlle A) was in the habit of bringing were not from Balbec and must indeed often have come from quite a distance. They never came in together, but (Mlle A) would come in, and ask for the door of her cabin to be left unlocked—as she was expecting a friend, and the person to whom I spoke knew what that meant. This person could not give me any other details, as she does not remember very well, “which is easy to understand after such a long time.” Besides, this person did not try to find out, because she is very discreet, and it was to her advantage because (Mlle A) brought her in a lot of money. She was quite sincerely touched to hear that she was dead. It is true that so young it is a great calamity for her and for her family. I await Monsieur's orders to know whether I may leave Balbec where I do not think that I can learn anything more. I thank Monsieur again for the little holiday that he has procured me, and which has been very pleasant especially as the weather is as fine as could be. The season

promises well for this year. We hope that Monsieur will come and put in a little apparition.

I can think of nothing else to say that will interest Monsieur, etc.

To understand how deeply these words penetrated my being, it must be remembered that the questions that I had been asking myself with regard to Albertine were not incidental, unimportant questions, questions of detail, the only questions as a matter of fact that we ask ourself about anyone who is not ourself, whereby we are enabled to proceed, wrapped in impervious thought, through the midst of suffering, falsehood, vice and death. No, in Albertine's case, they were essential questions: In her heart of hearts what was she? What were her thoughts? What were her loves? Did she lie to me? Had my life with her been as lamentable as Swann's life with Odette? And so the point reached by Aimé's reply, although it was not a general but a particular reply—and precisely for that reason—was indeed in Albertine, in myself, the uttermost depths.

At last I saw before my eyes, in that arrival of Albertine at the baths along the narrow lane with the lady in gray, a fragment of that past that seemed to me no less mysterious, no less horrifying than I had feared when I imagined it as enclosed in the memory, in the look in Albertine's eyes. No doubt anyone but myself might have dismissed as insignificant these details, upon which my inability, now that Albertine was dead, to secure a denial of them from herself, conferred the equivalent of a sort of probability. It is indeed probable that for Albertine, even if they had been true, her own misdeeds, if she had admitted them, whether her conscience thought them innocent or reprehensible, whether her sensuality had found them exquisite or distinctly dull, would not have been accompanied by that inexpressible sense of horror from which I was unable to detach them. I myself, with the help of my own love of women, albeit they could not have been the same thing to Albertine, could more or less imagine what she felt. And indeed it was already a first degree of suffering, merely to picture her to myself desiring as I had so often desired, lying to me as I had so often lied to her, preoccupied with one girl or another, putting herself out for her, as I had done for Mlle de Stermaria and so many others, not to mention the peasant girls whom I met in the countryside. Yes, all my own desires helped me to understand, to a certain degree, what hers had been; it was by this time an intense suffering in which all my desires, the keener they had been,

had changed into torments that were all the more cruel; as though in this algebra of sensibility they reappeared with the same coefficient but with a minus instead of a plus sign. To Albertine, so far as I was capable of judging her by my own standard, her misdeeds, however anxious she might have been to conceal them from me—which made me suppose that she was conscious of her guilt or was afraid of hurting me—her misdeeds, because she had planned them to suit her own taste in the clear light of imagination in which desire plays, appeared to her nevertheless as things of the same nature as the rest of life, pleasures for herself that she had not had the strength to deny herself, griefs for me that she had sought to avoid causing me by concealing them, but pleasures and griefs that might be numbered among the other pleasures and griefs of life. But for me, it was from outside, without my having been forewarned, without my having been able myself to elaborate them, it was from Aimé's letter that there had come to me the visions of Albertine arriving at the baths and preparing her tip.

No doubt it was because in that silent and deliberate arrival of Albertine with the woman in gray I read the rendezvous that they had made, that convention of going to make love in a shower cabin, which implied an experience of corruption, the well-concealed organization of a double life, it was because these images brought me the terrible tidings of Albertine's guilt that they had immediately caused me a physical grief from which they would never be detached. But at once my grief had reacted upon them: an objective fact, such as an image, differs according to the internal state in which we approach it. And grief is as potent in altering reality as is drunkenness. Combined with these images, my suffering had at once made of them something absolutely different from what might be for anyone else a lady in gray, a tip, a shower, the street that had witnessed the deliberate arrival of Albertine with the lady in gray. All these images—escaping from a life of falsehood and misconduct such as I had never conceived—my suffering had immediately altered in their very substance; I did not see them in the light that illuminates earthly spectacles, they were a fragment of another world, of an unknown and accursed planet, a glimpse of hell. My hell was all that Balbec, all those neighboring villages from which, according to Aimé's letter, she frequently collected girls younger than herself whom she took to the baths. That mystery that I had long ago imagined in the country around Balbec and that had been dispelled after I had stayed there, which I had then hoped to grasp again when I knew

Albertine because, when I saw her pass by on the beach, when I was mad enough to desire that she might not be virtuous, I thought that she must be its incarnation, how fearfully now everything that related to Balbec was impregnated with it! The names of those stations, Toutainville, Épreville, Incarville, become so familiar, so soothing, when I heard them shouted at night as I returned from the Verdurins', now that I thought how Albertine had been staying at one, had gone from there to another, must often have ridden on her bicycle to a third, they aroused in me an anxiety more cruel than on the first occasion, when I had seen them with such misgivings from the little local train with my grandmother before arriving at a Balbec that I did not yet know.

It is one of the faculties of jealousy to reveal to us the extent to which the reality of external facts and the sentiments of the heart are an unknown element that lends itself to endless suppositions. We believe that we know exactly what things are and what people think, for the simple reason that we do not care about them. But as soon as we have the desire to know, which the jealous man feels, then it becomes a dizzy kaleidoscope in which we can no longer distinguish anything. Had Albertine been unfaithful to me? With whom? In what house? On what day? The day on which she had said this or that to me, when I remembered that I had in the course of it said this or that? I could not tell. Nor did I know what were her feelings for me, whether they were inspired by self-interest or by affection. And all of a sudden I remembered some trivial incident, for example that Albertine had wished to go to Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, saying that the name interested her, and perhaps simply because she had made the acquaintance of some peasant girl who lived there. But it meant nothing that Aimé should have found out all this for me from the woman at the baths, since Albertine must remain eternally unaware that he had informed me, the need to know having always been exceeded, in my love for Albertine, by the need to show her that I knew; for this brought down the partition of different illusions that separated us, without having ever had the result of making her love me more, far from it. And now, since she was dead, the second of these needs had been amalgamated with the effect of the first: to picture to myself the conversation in which I would have informed her of what I had learned, as vividly as the conversation in which I would have asked her to tell me what I did not know; that is to say, to see her by my side, to hear her answering me kindly, to see her cheeks become plump again, her eyes shed their

malice and assume an air of melancholy; that is to say, to love her still and to forget the fury of my jealousy in the despair of my loneliness. The painful mystery of this impossibility of ever making known to her what I had learned and of establishing our relations upon the truth of what I had only just discovered (and would not have been able, perhaps, to discover, but for her death) substituted its sadness for the more painful mystery of her conduct. What? To have so keenly desired that Albertine should know that I had heard the story of the baths, Albertine who no longer existed! This again was one of the consequences of our inability, when we have to consider the matter of death, to picture to ourselves anything but life. Albertine no longer existed. But to me she was the person who had concealed from me that she had assignations with women at Balbec, who imagined that she had succeeded in keeping me in ignorance of them. When we try to consider what will happen to us after our own death, is it not still our living self that we mistakenly project before us? And is it much more absurd, when all is said, to regret that a woman who no longer exists is unaware that we have learned what she was doing six years ago than to desire that of ourselves, who will be dead, the public will still speak with approval a century hence? If there is more real foundation in the latter than in the former case, the regrets of my retrospective jealousy proceeded nonetheless from the same optical error as in other men the desire for posthumous fame. And yet if this impression of all the solemn finality of my separation from Albertine had momentarily supplanted my idea of her misdeeds, it only made them worse by bestowing upon them an irremediable character. I saw myself astray in life as on an endless beach where I was alone and where, in whatever direction I might turn, I would never meet her. Fortunately, I found most appropriately in my memory—as there are always all sorts of things, some noxious, others salutary, in that heap from which memories come to light only one by one—I discovered, as a craftsman discovers the object that will serve for what he wishes to make, an observation of my grandmother's. She had said to me, with reference to an improbable story that the shower attendant had told Mme de Villeparisis: "She is a woman who must suffer from a disease of mendacity." This memory was a great comfort to me. What importance could the story have that the woman had told Aimé? Especially as, after all, she had seen nothing. A girl can come and take showers with her friends without having any bad intentions. Perhaps for her own glorification the woman had

exaggerated the amount of the tip. I had indeed heard Françoise maintain once that my Aunt Léonie had said in her hearing that she had “a million a month to spend,” which was utter nonsense; another time that she had seen my Aunt Léonie give Eulalie four thousand-franc notes, whereas a fifty-franc note folded in four seemed to me scarcely probable. And so I sought—and, in course of time, managed—to rid myself of the painful certainty that I had taken such trouble to acquire, tossed to and fro as I still was between the desire to know and the fear of suffering. Then my tenderness might revive anew, but, simultaneously with it, a sorrow at being parted from Albertine, during the course of which I was perhaps even more wretched than in the recent hours when it had been jealousy that tormented me. But my jealousy suddenly revived, when I thought of Balbec, because of the vision that all at once reappeared (and which until then had never made me suffer and indeed appeared one of the most innocuous in my memory) of the dining room at Balbec in the evening, with, on the other side of the windows, as in front of the luminous glass of an aquarium,⁶⁰ all that populace crowded together in the dusk (I had never thought of this) causing the fishergirls and the girls of the people to brush up against the girls of the bourgeoisie jealous of that luxury, new to Balbec, that luxury from which, if not their means, at any rate avarice and tradition excluded their parents, girls among whom there had certainly been almost every evening Albertine whom I did not then know and who doubtless used to pick up some little girl whom she would meet a few minutes later in the dark, upon the sands, or else in a deserted bathing hut at the foot of the cliff. Then my sadness would revive, I had just heard like a sentence of banishment the sound of the elevator, which instead of stopping at my floor, went on higher. And yet the only person from whom I could have hoped for a visit would never come again, she was dead. And in spite of this, when the elevator did stop at my floor, my heart throbbed, for an instant I said to myself: “What if, after all, it was only a dream! Perhaps it’s her, she is going to ring the bell, she has come back, Françoise will come in and say with more alarm than anger—for she is even more superstitious than vindictive, and would be less afraid of the living girl than of what she will perhaps take for a ghost: ‘Monsieur will never guess who is here.’” I tried not to think of anything, to take up a newspaper. But I found it impossible to read the articles written by men who felt no real grief. Of a trivial song, one of them said: “It moves one to *tears*,” whereas I myself would have

listened to it with such joy had Albertine been alive. Another, albeit a great writer, because he had been applauded when he alighted from a train, said that he had received “an *unforgettable* welcome,” whereas I, if it had been I who received that welcome, would not have given it even a moment’s thought. And a third assured his readers that, but for its tiresome politics, life in Paris would be “altogether delightful,” whereas I knew well that even without politics that life could be nothing but atrocious to me, and would have seemed to me delightful, even with its politics, could I have found Albertine again. The sporting correspondent said (we were in the month of May): “This season of the year is truly distressing, let us say rather disastrous, to the true sportsman, for there is nothing, absolutely nothing in the way of game,” and the art critic said of the Salon: “In the face of this method of arranging an exhibition we are overcome by an immense discouragement, by an infinite sadness . . .” If the strength of what I was feeling made me regard as untruthful and colorless the expressions of men who had no true happiness or sorrow in their lives, on the other hand the most insignificant lines that could, however remotely, be linked either to Normandy, or to Touraine, or to hydrotherapeutic establishments, or to Berma, or to the Princesse de Guermantes, or to love, or to absence, or to infidelity, at once set before my eyes, without my having the time to turn them away from it, the image of Albertine, and my tears started anew. Moreover, usually I could not even read these newspapers, for the mere act of opening one of them reminded me at once that I used to open them when Albertine was alive, and that she was alive no longer; I let them drop without having the strength to unfold their pages. Each impression called up an impression that was identical but marred, because there had been cut out of it Albertine’s existence, so that I had never the heart to live to the end these mutilated minutes. Even when little by little, Albertine ceased to be present in my thoughts and all-powerful over my heart, I felt at once a stab of sorrow if I had occasion, as in the time when she was there, to go into her room, to grope for the light, to sit down by the pianola. Divided into a number of little household gods, she dwelt for a long time in the flame of the candle, the doorknob, the back of a chair, and other domains more immaterial such as a night of insomnia or the emotion that was caused me by the first visit of a woman who had attracted me. In spite of this the few sentences that I read in the course of a day or that my mind recalled that I had read, often aroused in me a cruel jealousy. To do this, they required not

so much to supply me with a valid argument in favor of the immorality of women as to revive an old impression connected to the life of Albertine. Transported then to a forgotten moment the force of which had not been dulled the habit of thinking of it, and in which Albertine still lived, her misdeeds became more immediate, more agonizing, more atrocious. Then I asked myself again whether I could be certain that the shower woman's revelations were false. A good way of finding out the truth would be to send Aimé to Touraine, to spend a few days in the neighborhood of Mme Bontemps's villa. If Albertine enjoyed the pleasures that one woman takes with others, if it was in order not to be deprived of them any longer that she had left me, she must, as soon as she was free, have sought to indulge in them and have succeeded, in an area that she knew and to which she would not have chosen to withdraw had she not expected to find greater facilities there than in my house. No doubt there was nothing extraordinary in the fact that Albertine's death had so little altered my preoccupations. When our mistress is alive, a large proportion of the thoughts that form what we call our love come to us during the hours when she is not by our side. Thus we acquire the habit of having as the object of our reverie an absent person, and one who, even if she remains absent for a few hours only, during those hours is no more than a memory. And so death does not make any great difference. When Aimé returned, I asked him to go down to Châtellerault, and thus by virtue not only of my thoughts, my sorrows, the emotion caused me by a name connected, however remotely, with a certain person, but also of all my actions, the inquiries that I undertook, the use that I made of my money, all of which was devoted to the discovery of Albertine's actions, I may say that throughout this year my life remained fully occupied with a love affair, with a veritable liaison. And she who was its object was dead. We say at times that something may survive of a person after his death, if the person was an artist and put a little of himself into his work. It is perhaps in the same way that a sort of cutting taken from one person and grafted on to the heart of another continues to carry on its existence even when the person from whom it had been detached has perished.

Aimé took lodgings close to Mme Bontemps's villa; he made the acquaintance of a maidservant, and of a man from whom Albertine had often hired a carriage by the day. These people had noticed nothing. In a second letter, Aimé informed me that he had learned from a young laundress in the town that Albertine had a peculiar way of gripping her arm

when she brought back the clean linen. “But,” she said, “the young lady never did anything more.” I sent Aimé the money that paid for his journey, that paid for the pain that he had done me by his letter, and at the same time I was making an effort to heal it by telling myself that what the laundress had described was a familiarity that gave no proof of any vicious desire, when I received a telegram from Aimé: HAVE LOTS OF NEWS FOR MONSIEUR. LETTER FOLLOWS. On the following day came a letter the envelope of which was enough to make me tremble; I had recognized that it came from Aimé, for each person, even the humblest of us, has under his control those little familiar creatures at once living and couched in a sort of trance upon the paper, the characters of his handwriting that he alone possesses.

At first the young laundress refused to tell me anything, she assured me that Mlle Albertine had never done anything more than pinch her arm. But to get her to talk, I took her out to dinner, I made sure she drank a lot. Then she told me that Mlle Albertine used often to meet her on the bank of the Loire, when she went to bathe, that Mlle Albertine who was in the habit of getting up very early to go and bathe was in the habit of meeting her by the water’s edge, at a spot where the trees are so thick that nobody can see you, and besides there is nobody who can see you at that hour in the morning. Then the young laundress brought her girlfriends and they bathed and afterward, as it was already very hot down here and the sun beats down on you even through the trees, they used to lie about on the grass drying themselves and playing and caressing and tickling each other. The young laundress confessed to me that she loved to amuse herself with her girlfriends and that seeing Mlle Albertine was always rubbing up against her in her bathrobe she made her take it off and used to caress her with her tongue along the throat and arms, even on the soles of her feet that Mlle Albertine stretched out to her. The laundress undressed too, and they played at pushing each other into the water; after that she told me nothing more but being entirely at your service and ready to do anything in the world to please you, I took the young laundress to bed with me. She asked me if I would like her to do to me what she used to do to Mlle Albertine when she took off her bathrobe. And she said to me: (If you could have seen how she used to quiver, that young lady, she said to me: “Oh, it’s too heavenly,” and she got so excited that she could not keep from biting me.) I could still see

the marks on the laundry girl's arms. And I can understand Mlle Albertine's pleasure, for that young girl is really a very good performer.

I had indeed suffered at Balbec when Albertine told me of her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil. But Albertine was there to console me. Afterward when, by my excessive curiosity as to her actions, I had succeeded in making Albertine leave me, when Françoise informed me that she was no longer in the house and I found myself alone, I had suffered more keenly still. But at least the Albertine whom I had loved remained in my heart. Now, in her place—to punish me for having pushed farther a curiosity to which, contrary to what I had supposed, death had not put an end—what I found was a different girl, heaping up lies and deceits one upon another, in the place where the former had so sweetly reassured me by swearing that she had never tasted those pleasures that, in the intoxication of her recaptured liberty, she had gone down to enjoy to the point of swooning, of biting that young laundress whom she used to meet at sunrise on the bank of the Loire, and to whom she used to say: “Oh, it’s too heavenly.” A different Albertine, not only in the sense in which we understand the word different when it is used of other people. If people are different from what we have supposed, since this difference does affect us profoundly, as the pendulum of intuition cannot move outward with a greater oscillation than that of its inward movement, it is only in the superficial regions of the people themselves that we place these differences. Formerly, when I learned that a woman loved other women, she did not for that reason seem to me a different woman, of a peculiar essence. But when it is a question of a woman with whom we are in love, in order to rid ourself of the pain that we feel at the thought that such a thing is possible, we seek to find out not only what she has done, but what she felt while she was doing it, what idea she had in her mind of the thing that she was doing; then descending and advancing farther and farther, by the intensity of our pain we arrive at the mystery, the essence. I suffered to the very depth of my being, in my body, in my heart—far more than I would have been pained by the fear of losing my life—from this curiosity to which all the force of my intelligence and my subconscious contributed; and thus it was into the core of Albertine’s own being that I now projected everything that I learned about her. And the pain that the revelation of Albertine’s vice had thus driven into me to so great a depth was to render me much later a final service. Like the harm that I had done my

grandmother,⁶¹ the harm that Albertine had done me was a last bond between her and myself that outlived memory even, for with the conservation of energy that belongs to everything that is physical, suffering has no need of the lessons of memory. Thus a man who has forgotten the charming nights spent by moonlight in the woods, suffers still from the rheumatism that he then contracted.

Those tastes that she had denied but that were hers, those tastes the discovery of which had come to me not by a cold process of reasoning but in the burning anguish that I had felt on reading the words: “Oh, it’s too heavenly,” an anguish that gave them a special quality of their own, those tastes were not merely added to the image of Albertine as is added to the hermit crab the new shell that it drags after it, but, rather, like a salt that comes in contact with another salt, alters its color, and, what is more, its nature. When the young laundress must have said to her girlfriends: “Just imagine, I would never have believed it, well, the young lady is one too!” to me it was not merely a vice hitherto unsuspected by them that they added to Albertine’s person, but the discovery that she was another person, a person like themselves, speaking the same language, which, by making her the compatriot of other women, made her even more alien to me, proved that what I had possessed of her, what I carried in my heart, was only quite a small part of her, and that the rest, which was made so extensive by not being merely the thing that is already so mysteriously important, an individual desire, but being shared with others, she had always concealed from me, had kept me away from it, as a woman might have concealed from me that she was a native of an enemy country and a spy; and would indeed have been acting even more treacherously than a spy, for a spy deceives us only as to her nationality, whereas Albertine had deceived me as to her profoundest humanity, the fact that she did not belong to the ordinary human race, but to an alien race that moves among it, conceals itself among it and never blends with it.⁶² I had as it happened seen two paintings by Elstir showing against a leafy background nude women. In one of them, one of the girls is raising her foot as Albertine must have raised hers when she offered it to the laundress. With her other foot she is pushing into the water the other girl, who gaily resists, her thigh raised, her foot barely immersed in the blue water. I remembered now that the raising of the thigh made the same swan’s-neck curve with the angle of the knee that was made by the droop of Albertine’s thigh when she was lying by my side on

the bed, and I had often meant to tell her that she reminded me of those paintings. But I had refrained from doing so, in order not to awaken in her mind the image of nude female bodies. Now I saw her, side by side with the laundress and her girlfriends, recomposing the group that I had so admired when I was seated among Albertine's friends at Balbec. And if I had been an art lover sensitive to beauty alone, I would have recognized that Albertine recomposed it with a thousand times more beauty, now that its elements were the nude statues of goddesses like those that the great sculptors scattered under the groves of Versailles or plunged in the fountains to be washed and polished by the caresses of their eddies. Now I saw her by the side of the laundress, as a girl by the water's edge, in their twofold nudity of marble maidens in the midst of a grove of vegetation and dipping into the water like bas-reliefs of Naiads.⁶³ Remembering how Albertine looked as she lay on my bed, I thought I could see the curve of her thigh, I saw it, it was a swan's neck, it was seeking the other girl's mouth. Then I no longer even saw a thigh, but the bold neck of a swan, like the one that can be seen in a frenzied sketch seeking the mouth of a Leda⁶⁴ whom we see in all the palpitation peculiar to feminine pleasure, because there is nothing else but a swan, she seems more alone, just as we discover on the telephone the inflexions of a voice that we fail to perceive so long as it is not dissociated from a face in which we objectify its expression. In this sketch, the pleasure, instead of seeking the woman who inspires it and who is absent, replaced by a motionless swan, is concentrated in her who feels it. At certain moments the communication was cut between my heart and my memory. What Albertine had done with the laundress was indicated to me now only by almost algebraical abbreviations that no longer meant anything to me; but a hundred times an hour the interrupted current was restored, and my heart was pitilessly scorched by a fire from hell, while I saw Albertine, resuscitated by my jealousy, really alive, stiffen beneath the caresses of the young laundry girl, to whom she was saying: "Oh, it's too heavenly." As she was alive at the moment when she committed her misdeed, that is to say at the moment at which I myself found myself placed, it was not sufficient to know of the misdeed, I wanted her to know that I knew. And so, if at those moments I thought with regret that I would never see her again, this regret bore the stamp of my jealousy, and, very different from the lacerating regret of the moments when I loved her, was only regret at not being able to say to her: "You thought that I would never know what you did after you

left me, well, I know everything, the laundress on the bank of the Loire, you said to her: ‘Oh, it’s too heavenly,’ I have seen the bite.” No doubt I said to myself: “Why torment myself? She who took her pleasure with the laundress no longer exists, and consequently was not a person whose actions retain any importance. She is not telling herself that I know. But neither is she telling herself that I do not know, since she tells herself nothing.” But this line of reasoning convinced me less than the visual image of her pleasure that brought me back to the moment in which she had tasted it. What we feel is the only thing that exists for us, and we project it into the past, into the future, without letting ourselves be stopped by the fictitious barriers of death. If my regret that she was dead was subjected at such moments to the influence of my jealousy and assumed this so peculiar form, that influence extended over my dreams of occultism, of immortality, which were no more than an effort to realize what I desired. And so at those moments if I could have succeeded in evoking her by turning a table as Bergotte had at one time thought possible, or in meeting her in the other life as the Abbé X thought, I would have wished to do so only in order to repeat to her: “I know about the laundry girl. You said to her: ‘Oh, it’s too heavenly,’ I have seen the bite.” What came to my rescue against this image of the laundress, was—certainly when it had lasted for a while—was that image itself, because we really know only what is new, what suddenly introduces into our sensibility a change of tone that strikes us, that for which habit has not yet substituted its colorless facsimiles. But it was, above all, this fragmentation of Albertine into many parts, into many Albertines, that was her sole mode of existence in me. Moments recurred in which she had merely been kind, or intelligent, or serious, or even addicted to nothing but sport. And this fragmentation, was it not after all right that it should soothe me? For if it was not in itself anything real, if it depended on the successive form of the hours in which it had appeared to me, a form that remained that of my memory as the curve of the projections of my magic lantern depended on the curve of the colored slides, did it not represent in its own way a truth, a thoroughly objective truth too, to wit, that each of us is not a single person, but contains many persons who do not all have the same moral value and that if a vicious Albertine had existed, it did not mean that there had not been others, the one who enjoyed talking to me about Saint-Simon in her room, the one who on the night when I had told her that we must part had said so sadly: “This pianola, this room, to think that I will

never see any of these things again” and, when she saw the anguish that my lie had finally communicated to me, had exclaimed with a sincere pity: “Oh, no, anything rather than make you unhappy, I promise that I will never try to see you again.” Then I was no longer alone. I felt the wall that separated us vanish. As soon as this good Albertine had returned, I had found again the one person from whom I could demand the antidote to the sufferings that Albertine was causing me. True, I still wanted to speak to her about the story of the laundry girl, but it was no longer by way of a cruel triumph, and to show her maliciously how much I knew. As I would have done had Albertine been alive, I asked her tenderly whether the tale about the laundry girl was true. She swore to me that it was not, that Aimé was not very truthful and that, wanting to appear to have earned the money that I had given him, he had not liked to return with nothing to show, and had made the laundry girl tell him what he wanted to hear. No doubt Albertine had never ceased lying to me. And yet in the ebb and flow of her contradictions, I felt that there had been a certain progression due to myself. That she had not indeed from the beginning confided in me (perhaps, it is true, involuntarily in a remark that escaped her lips), I would not have sworn. I no longer remembered. And besides she had such odd ways of naming certain things, that they might be interpreted in one way or the other, but the feeling that she had had of my jealousy had led her afterward to retract with horror what at first she had complacently admitted. Besides, Albertine had no need to tell me this. To be convinced of her innocence it was enough for me to embrace her, and I could do so now that the wall that separated us had fallen, like that impalpable and resisting wall that after a quarrel rises between two lovers and against which kisses would be shattered. No, she had no need to tell me anything. Whatever she might have done, whatever she might have wanted to do, the poor child, there were sentiments in which, over the barrier that divided us, we could be united. If the story was true, and if Albertine had concealed her tastes from me, it was in order not to make me unhappy. I had the pleasure of hearing this Albertine say so. Besides, had I ever known any other? The two chief causes of error in our relations with another person are, having ourselves a kind heart, or else being in love with that other person. We fall in love for a smile, a glance, a shoulder. That is enough; then, in the long hours of hope or sorrow, we fabricate a person, we compose a character. And when later on we see much of the beloved person, we can no more, whatever the cruel

reality that confronts us, strip off that good character, that nature of a woman who loves us, from the person with that glance, that shoulder, than we can when she has grown old eliminate her youthful face from a person whom we have known since her girlhood. I called to mind the noble glance, kind and compassionate, of that Albertine, her plump cheeks, the coarse grain of her neck. It was the image of a dead woman, but, since this dead woman was alive, it was easy for me to do immediately what I would inevitably have done if she had been by my side in her living body (what I would do were I ever to meet her again in another life), I forgave her.

The moments that I had spent with this Albertine were so precious to me that I would not have let any of them escape me. Now, at times, as we recover the remnants of a squandered fortune, I recaptured some of these that I had thought to be lost; as I tied a scarf behind my neck instead of in front, I remembered a drive of which I had never thought again, during which, in order that the cold air might not reach my throat, Albertine had arranged my scarf for me in this way after first kissing me. That simple drive, restored to my memory by so humble a gesture, gave me the same pleasure as the intimate objects once the property of a dead woman who was dear to us which her old servant brings to us and which are so precious to us; my grief found itself enriched by it, all the more so as I had never given another thought to the scarf in question.⁶⁵

And now Albertine, liberated once more, had resumed her flight; men, women followed her. She was alive in me. I became aware that this great prolonged love of Albertine was like the ghost of the feeling that I had had for her, reproduced its various elements and obeyed the same laws as the sentimental reality that it reflected on the farther side of death. For I felt quite sure that, if I could place some interval between my thoughts of Albertine, yet if, on the other hand, I had allowed too long an interval to elapse, I would cease to love her; a clean break would have left me indifferent to her, as I had now become toward my grandmother. Too much time spent without thinking of her would have broken in my memory the continuity that is the very principle of life, which however may be resumed after a certain interval of time. Had not this been the case with my love for Albertine when she was alive, a love that had been able to revive after a quite long interval during which I had never given her a thought? My memory must have been obedient to the same laws, must have been unable to endure longer intervals, for all that it did was, like an aurora borealis,

reflect after Albertine's death the feeling I had had for her, it was like the phantom of my love.

Moreover, my grief assumed so many forms that occasionally I no longer recognized it; I longed to be loved in earnest, decided to seek a person who would live with me; this seemed to me to be the sign that I no longer loved Albertine, whereas it meant that I loved her still; for the need to be loved in earnest was, just as much as the desire to kiss Albertine's plump cheeks, merely a part of my regret. It was when I had forgotten her that I might find it to be wiser, happier to live without love. And so my regret for Albertine, because it was it that aroused in me the need of a sister, made that need insatiable. And as my regret for Albertine grew fainter, the need of a sister, which was only an unconscious form of that regret, would become less imperious. And yet these two residues of my love did not decline at the same rapid rate. There were hours when I had made up my mind to marry, so completely had the former been eclipsed, the latter on the contrary retaining its full strength. And on the other hand, later on, my jealous memories having died away, suddenly at times a feeling of tenderness for Albertine welled up in my heart, and then, thinking of my own love affairs with other women, I told myself that she would have understood, would have shared them—and her vice became almost a reason for loving her. At times my jealousy revived in moments when I no longer remembered Albertine, although it was of her that I was jealous. I thought that I was jealous of Andrée, à propos of whom I heard at the time about an amorous adventure that she was having. But Andrée was to me merely a substitute, a bypath, a conduit⁶⁶ that brought me indirectly to Albertine. So it is that in our dreams we give a different face, a different name to a person as to whose underlying identity we are not mistaken. When all was said, notwithstanding the ebb and flow that upset in these particular instances the general law, the sentiments that Albertine had left with me were more difficult to extinguish than the memory of their original cause. Not only the sentiments, but the sensations. Different in this respect from Swann who, when he had begun to cease to love Odette, had not even been able to recreate in himself the sensation of his love, I felt myself still reliving a past that was no more than the story of another person; my inner self was now somehow split in two, and while its upper extremity was already hard and cold, it still burned at its base whenever a spark made the old current pass through it, even after my mind had long ceased to conceive of Albertine.

And as no image of her accompanied the painful palpitations that were substituted for it, and the tears that were brought to my eyes by a cold wind blowing as at Balbec through apple trees that were already pink with blossom, I was led to ask myself whether the renewal of my grief was not due to entirely pathological causes and whether what I took to be the revival of a memory and the final period of a state of love was not rather the first stage of heart disease.

There are in certain affections secondary complications that the sufferer is too apt to confuse with the malady itself. When they cease, he is surprised to find himself nearer to recovery than he has supposed. Of this sort had been the suffering caused me—the “complication” brought about—by Aimé’s letters with regard to the bathing establishment and the laundry girls. But a healer of broken hearts, had such a person visited me, would have found that, in other respects, my grief itself was on the way to recovery. No doubt in myself, since I was a man, one of those amphibious creatures who are plunged simultaneously in the past and in the reality of the moment, there still existed a contradiction between the living memory of Albertine and my consciousness of her death. But this contradiction was so to speak the opposite of what it had been before. The idea that Albertine was dead, this idea that at first used to contest so furiously with the idea that she was alive that I was obliged to run away from it as children run away from a breaking wave, this idea of her death, by the very force of its incessant onslaught, had ended by capturing the place in my mind that, a short while ago, was still occupied by the idea of her life. Without my being precisely aware of it, it was now this idea of Albertine’s death—no longer the present memory of her life—that formed the chief subject of my unconscious musings, with the result that if I interrupted them suddenly to reflect upon myself, what surprised me was not, as in the first days, that Albertine, so alive in me, could no longer exist upon the earth, could be dead, but that Albertine, who no longer existed upon the earth, who was dead, should have remained so alive in me. Built up by the contiguity of the memories that followed one another, the black tunnel, in which my thoughts had been dreaming so long that they had even ceased to be aware of it, was suddenly broken by an interval of sunlight, allowing me to see in the distance a blue and smiling universe in which Albertine was no more than a memory, unimportant and full of charm. Is it this one, I asked myself, that is the true Albertine, or is it indeed the person who, in the darkness through

which I have so long been moving, seemed to me the sole reality? The person I had been so short a time ago, who lived only in the perpetual expectation of the moment when Albertine would come in to say goodnight and to kiss him, a sort of multiplication of myself made this person appear to me as no longer anything more than a feeble part, already half-detached from myself, and like a flower opening its petals I felt the rejuvenating refreshment of an exfoliation. However, these brief illuminations succeeded perhaps only in making me more conscious of my love for Albertine, as happens with every idea that is too constant and has need of opposition to make it affirm itself. People who were alive during the war of 1870,⁶⁷ for example, say that the idea of war ended by seeming to them natural, not because they did not think enough about the war, but because they could think of nothing else. And in order to understand how strange and important a fact war is, it was necessary that, something else tearing them away from their permanent obsession, they should forget for a moment that a state of war prevailed, should find themselves once again as they had been in a time of peace, until all of a sudden upon the momentary blank there stood out distinctly at last the monstrous reality that they had long ceased to see, since there had been nothing else visible.

If only this withdrawal of my different impressions of Albertine had at least been carried out not in echelon but simultaneously, evenly, frontally, along the whole line of my memory, my recollections of her infidelities receding at the same time as those of her sweetness, oblivion would have brought me solace. It was not so. As on a beach where the tide recedes unevenly, I would be assailed by the onrush of one of my suspicions when the image of her tender presence had already withdrawn too far from me to be able to bring me its remedy. As for the infidelities, they had made me suffer because, however remote the year in which they had occurred, to me they were not remote; but I suffered from them less when they became remote, that is to say when I pictured them to myself less vividly, for the remoteness of a thing is in proportion rather to the visual power of the memory that is looking at it than to the real duration of the intervening days, like the memory of last night's dream that may seem to us more distant in its imprecision and obliteration than an event that is many years old. But although the idea of Albertine's death made headway in me, the reflux of the sensation that she was alive, if it did not arrest that progress, obstructed it nevertheless and prevented its being regular. And I realize now

that during this period (doubtless because of my having forgotten the hours in which she had been cloistered in my house, hours that, by dint of relieving me from any pain at misdeeds that seemed to me almost unimportant because I knew that she was not committing them, had become tantamount to so many proofs of her innocence), I underwent the martyrdom of living in the constant company of an idea quite as new as the idea that Albertine was dead (previously I had always started from the idea that she was alive), with an idea that I would have supposed it to be equally impossible to endure and that, without my noticing it, was gradually forming the basis of my consciousness, substituting itself for the idea that Albertine was innocent: the idea that she was guilty. When I believed that I was doubting her, I was on the contrary believing in her; similarly I took as the starting point of my other ideas the certainty—often proved false as the contrary idea had been—the certainty of her guilt, while I continued to imagine that I still felt doubts. I must have suffered intensely during that period, but I realize that it had to be so. We are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full. By protecting Albertine from any contact with the outer world, by forging the illusion that she was innocent, just as later on when I adopted as the basis of my reasoning the thought that she was alive, I was merely postponing the hour of my recovery, because I was postponing the long hours that must elapse as a preliminary to the end of the necessary sufferings. Now with regard to these ideas of Albertine's guilt, habit, were it to come into play, would do so according to the same laws that I had already experienced in the course of my life. Just as the name Guermantes had lost the significance and the charm of a road bordered with water lilies and of the window of Gilbert the Bad, Albertine's presence, that of the blue undulations of the sea,⁶⁸ the names of Swann, of the liftboy, of the Princesse de Guermantes and so many others had lost all that they had meant for me—that charm and that significance leaving me with a mere word that they considered important enough to stand on its own, as a man who has come to set a subordinate to work gives him his instructions and after a few weeks withdraws—similarly the painful knowledge of Albertine's guilt would be expelled from me by habit. Moreover, between now and then, as in the course of an attack launched from both flanks at once, in this action by habit two allies would mutually lend a hand. It was because this idea of Albertine's guilt would become for me an idea more probable, more habitual, that it would become less painful.

But on the other hand, because it would be less painful, the objections raised to my certainty of her guilt, which were inspired in my mind only by my desire not to suffer too acutely, would collapse one by one, and as each action precipitates the next, I would pass quickly enough from the certainty of Albertine's innocence to the certainty of her guilt. It was essential that I should live with the idea of Albertine's death, with the idea of her misdeeds, in order that these ideas might become habitual, that is to say that I might be able to forget these ideas and in the end to forget Albertine herself.

I had not yet reached this stage. At one time it was my memory made clearer by some intellectual excitement—such as reading a book—that revived my grief; at other times it was on the contrary my grief—when it was aroused, for example, by the anguish of a spell of stormy weather—which raised higher, brought nearer to the light, some memory of our love. Moreover these revivals of my love for the dead Albertine might occur after an interval of indifference interspersed with other curiosities, as after the long interval that had begun with her refusal to let me kiss her at Balbec,⁶⁹ during which I had thought far more about Mme de Guermantes, about Andrée, about Mlle de Stermaria; it had revived when I had begun again to see her frequently. But even now various preoccupations were able to bring about a separation—from a dead woman, this time—in which she left me more indifferent. All this for the same reason, that she was a living person for me. And even later on when I loved her less, this remained nevertheless for me one of those desires of which we soon grow tired, but that revive when we have allowed them to lie quiet for some time. I pursued one living woman, then another, then I returned to my dead one. Often it was in the most obscure recesses of myself, when I could no longer form any clear idea of Albertine, that a name came by chance to stimulate painful reactions, which I supposed to be no longer possible, like those dying people whose brains are no longer capable of thought and who are made to contract their muscles by the prick of a needle. And, during long periods, these stimulations happened to me so rarely that I was driven to seek for myself occasions of a grief, of a crisis of jealousy, in an attempt to reattach myself to the past, to remember her better. Since regret for a woman is only a recrudescence of love and remains subject to the same laws, the keenness of my regret was intensified by the same causes that in Albertine's lifetime had increased my love for her and in the front rank of which had always appeared jealousy and grief. But as a rule these occasions—for an illness, a

war, can always last far longer than the most prophetic wisdom has calculated—took me unawares and caused me such violent shocks that I thought far more of protecting myself against suffering than of appealing to them for a memory.

Moreover a word did not even need to be connected, like “Chaumont,”⁷⁰ with some suspicion (even a syllable common to different names was sufficient for my memory—as for an electrician who is content with any substance that is a good conductor—to restore the contact between Albertine and my heart) in order to reawaken that suspicion, to be the password, the magical “Open, Sesame” unlocking the door of a past that one had ceased to take into account, because, having seen more than enough of it, strictly speaking one no longer possessed it; one had been shorn of it, had supposed that by this subtraction one’s own personality had changed its form, like a geometrical figure that by the removal of an angle would lose one of its sides; certain phrases, for example, in which there occurred the name of a street, of a road, where Albertine might have been, were sufficient to incarnate a potential, nonexistent jealousy, in the quest of a body, a dwelling, some material location, some particular realization. Often it was simply during my sleep that these “reprises,” these “da capo”⁷¹ of our dreams that turn back in an instant several pages of our memory, several leaves of the calendar, brought me back, made me return to a painful but remote impression that had long since yielded its place to others but that now became present once more. As a rule, it was accompanied by a whole stage setting, clumsy but striking, which, giving me the illusion of reality, brought before my eyes, sounded in my ears what thenceforward dated from that night. Besides, in the history of a love affair and of its struggles against oblivion, do not our dreams occupy an even larger place than our waking state, our dreams that take no account of the infinitesimal divisions of time, suppress transitions, oppose sharp contrasts, undo in an instant the web of consolation so slowly woven during the day, and contrive for us, by night, a meeting with her whom we would eventually have forgotten, provided always that we did not see her again? For whatever anyone may say, we can perfectly well have in a dream the impression that what is happening is real. This would be impossible only for reasons drawn from our waking experience, an experience that at that moment is hidden from us. With the result that this improbable life seems to us real. Sometimes, by a defect in the internal lighting that spoiled the success of the play, my well-

staged memories giving me the illusion of life, I really believed that I had arranged to meet Albertine, that I was seeing her again, but then I found myself incapable of advancing to meet her, of uttering the words that I meant to say to her, of rekindling in order to see her the torch that had gone out, impossibilities that were simply in my dream the immobility, the dumbness, the blindness of the sleeper—as suddenly one sees in the faulty projection of a magic lantern a huge shadow, which ought not to be visible, obliterate the figures on the screen, which is the shadow of the lantern itself, or that of the operator. At other times Albertine appeared in my dream, and proposed to leave me once again, without my being moved by her determination. This was because from my memory there had been able to filter into the darkness of my sleep, a warning ray of light that, lodged in Albertine, deprived her future actions, the departure of which she informed me, of any importance, this was the knowledge that she was dead. But often, even more clearly, this memory that Albertine was dead was combined, without destroying it, with the sensation that she was alive. I chatted with her; while I was speaking, my grandmother came and went at the back of the room. Part of her chin had crumbled away like a corroded statue, but I found nothing unusual in that. I told Albertine that I had various questions to ask her with regard to the bathing establishment at Balbec and to a certain laundress in Touraine, but I postponed them to another occasion since we had plenty of time and there was no longer any urgency. She assured me that she was not doing anything wrong and that she had merely, the day before, kissed Mlle Vinteuil on the lips. “What? Is she here?” “Yes, in fact it is time for me to leave you, for I have to go and see her presently.” And since, now that Albertine was dead, I no longer kept her a prisoner in my house as in the last months of her life, her visit to Mlle Vinteuil alarmed me. I did not want to show it. Albertine told me that she had done no more than kiss her, but she was evidently beginning to lie again as in the days when she used to deny everything. Presently she would not be content, probably, with kissing Mlle Vinteuil. No doubt from a certain point of view I was wrong to let myself be disturbed like this, since, according to what we are told, the dead can feel nothing, can do nothing. People say so, but this did not change the fact that my grandmother, who was dead, had continued nevertheless to live for many years, and at that moment was passing to and fro in my room. And no doubt, once I was awake, this idea of a dead woman who continued to live ought to have

become as impossible for me to understand as it is to explain. But I had already formed it so many times in the course of those transient periods of madness that are our dreams, that I had become in time familiar with it; our memory of dreams may become lasting, if they repeat themselves often enough.

And I imagine that even if he is today cured and in his right mind again, the man who must understand even better than others what he wanted to say in the course of an earlier period of his mental life, would be the man who, when trying to explain to the visitors of an insane asylum that he himself was not crazy despite what the doctor said, gave as proof of his own sanity the mad delusions of each of the inmates, concluding, "For example, that man over there who looks just like everyone else, you wouldn't think him insane. Well, he is! He thinks he's Jesus Christ and that cannot be, because I am Jesus Christ myself!"⁷²

And long after my dream had ended, I remained tormented by the kiss that Albertine had told me that she had given in words that I thought I could still hear. And indeed, they must have passed very close to my ears since it was I myself who had uttered them. All day long, I continued to chat with Albertine, I questioned her, I forgave her, I made up for my forgetfulness of the things that I had always meant to say to her during her life. And all of a sudden I was startled by the thought that no reality any longer corresponded to the creature invoked by memory to whom all these remarks were addressed, that death had destroyed the various parts of the face to which the continual thrust of the will to live, now abolished, had alone given the unity of a person. At other times, without my having dreamed, as soon as I awoke, I felt that the wind had changed in me; it was blowing coldly and steadily from another direction, issuing from the remotest past, bringing back to me the sound of a clock striking far-off hours, the whistles of departing trains that I did not ordinarily hear. One day I tried to interest myself in a book, a novel by Bergotte, of which I had been especially fond. Its congenial characters appealed to me strongly, and very soon, reconquered by the charm of the book, I began to hope, as for a personal pleasure, that the wicked woman might be punished; my eyes grew moist when the happiness of the young lovers was assured. "But then," I exclaimed in despair, "from my attaching so much importance to what Albertine may have done, I cannot conclude that her personality is something real that cannot be destroyed, that I will find her one day in her

own likeness in heaven, if I invoke with so many pleas, await with such impatience, welcome with such floods of tears the success of a person who has never existed save in Bergotte's imagination, whom I have never seen, whose appearance I am at liberty to imagine as I please!" Besides, in this novel, there were seductive girls, amorous correspondences, deserted paths where lovers meet, this reminded me that one may love clandestinely, it revived my jealousy, as though Albertine had still been able to stroll along deserted paths. And there was also the incident of a man who meets after fifty years a woman whom he loved in her youth, does not recognize her, is bored in her company. And this reminded me that love does not last forever and crushed me as though I were destined to be parted from Albertine and to meet her again with indifference in my old age. If I caught sight of a map of France, my timorous eyes took care not to fall upon Touraine so that I might not be jealous, nor, so that I might not be miserable, on Normandy where the map marked at least Balbec and Doncières, between which I placed all those roads that we had traversed so many times together. In the midst of other names of towns or villages of France, names that were merely visible or audible, the name of Tours for example seemed to be differently composed, no longer of immaterial images, but of venomous substances that acted in an immediate fashion upon my heart whose beatings they quickened and made painful. And if this force extended to certain names, which it had made so different from the rest, how when I remained more shut up in myself, when I confined myself to Albertine herself, could I be astonished that, emanating from a girl who was probably just like any other girl, this force that I found irresistible, and for the production of which any other woman might have served, had been the result of an entanglement and of a bringing in contact of dreams, desires, habits, affections, with the requisite conjunction of alternate pains and pleasures? And this continued after her death, memory being sufficient to sustain real life, which is mental. I remembered Albertine alighting from a railway carriage and telling me that she wanted to go to Saint-Martin-le-Vêtu, and I saw her also before that with her "polo" pulled down over her cheeks; I found once more possibilities of happiness, toward which I sprang saying to myself: "We might have gone on together to Infreville, to Doncières." There was no watering place near Balbec in which I did not see her, with the result that that country, like a mythological land that had been preserved, restored to me, living and cruel, the most ancient, the most

charming legends, those that had been most obliterated by the sequel of my love. Ah! what anguish were I ever to have to lie down again on that bed at Balbec around whose brass frame, as around an immovable pivot, a fixed bar, my life had moved, had evolved, bringing successively into its compass merry conversations with my grandmother, the nightmare of her death, Albertine's soothing caresses, the discovery of her vice, and now a new life in which, looking at the glazed bookcases upon which the sea was reflected,⁷³ I knew that Albertine would never come into the room again! Was it not, that Balbec hotel, like the sole set of a provincial theater, in which for years past the most diverse plays have been performed, which has served for a comedy, for first one tragedy, then for another, for a purely poetical drama, that hotel that already receded quite far into my past? The fact that this part alone remained always the same, with its walls, its bookcases, its mirror, through the course of new epochs in my life, made me more conscious that, all in all, it was everything else, it was I myself who had changed, and gave me thus the impression that the mysteries of life, of love, of death, in which children imagine in their optimism that they have no share, are not set apart, but that we perceive with a dolorous pride that they have embodied themselves in our own life through the course of the years.

I tried at times to take an interest in the newspapers. But I found the act of reading them repellent, and moreover it was not innocuous. The fact is that from each of our ideas, as from a crossroads in a forest, so many roads branch off in different directions that at the moment when I least expected it I found myself faced by a new memory. The title of Fauré's melody *Le Secret*⁷⁴ had led me to the Duc de Broglie's *Le Secret du Roi*,⁷⁵ the name Broglie to that of Chaumont. Or else the words "Good Friday" had made me think of Golgotha,⁷⁶ Golgotha of the etymology of the word which is, it seems, the equivalent of *Calvus Mons*, Chaumont.⁷⁷ But, whatever the path by which I might have arrived at Chaumont, at that moment I received so violent a shock that I could think only of how to protect myself from pain rather than search for memories. Some moments after the shock, my intelligence, which like the sound of thunder travels less rapidly, brought me the reason. Chaumont had made me think of the Buttes-Chaumont, where Mme Bontemps had told me that Andrée used often to go with Albertine, whereas Albertine had told me that she had never seen the

Buttes-Chaumont. After a certain age our memories are so intertwined with one another that the thing of which we are thinking, the book that we are reading scarcely matters anymore. We have put something of ourself everywhere, everything is fertile, everything is dangerous, and we can make discoveries no less precious than in Pascal's *Pensées*⁷⁸ in an advertisement for soap.

No doubt an incident such as this of the Buttes-Chaumont, which at the time had appeared to me futile, was in itself far less serious, far less decisive evidence against Albertine than the story of the bath attendant or the laundress. But, in the first place, a memory that comes to us by chance finds in us an intact capacity for imagining; that is to say in this case for suffering, which we have partly exhausted when it is on the contrary ourselves who deliberately applied our mind to re-creating a memory. And to these latter memories (those that concerned the bath attendant and the laundry girl) ever present albeit obscured in my consciousness, like the furniture placed in the semidarkness of a gallery which, without being able to see them, we avoid bumping into, I had grown accustomed. It was, on the contrary, a long time since I had given a thought to the Buttes-Chaumont, or, to take another example, to Albertine's scrutiny of the mirror in the casino at Balbec, or to her unexplained delay on the evening when I had waited so long for her after the Guermantes soirée, to any of those parts of her life that remained outside my heart and that I would have liked to know in order that they might become assimilated, annexed to it, merged with the sweeter memories formed therein by an interior Albertine, an Albertine genuinely possessed. Lifting a corner of the heavy curtain of habit (stupefying habit that during the whole course of our life conceals from us almost the whole universe, and in the dead of night, without changing their label, substitutes for the most dangerous or intoxicating poisons of life some kind of anodyne that procures no delights), such memories would come back to me as on the day of the incident itself with that fresh and piercing novelty of a recurring season, of a change in the routine of our hours, which, in the realm of pleasures also, if we get into a carriage on the first fine day in spring, or leave the house at sunrise, makes us observe our own insignificant actions with a lucid exaltation that makes that intense minute worth more than the sum total of the preceding days. Days in the past cover up little by little those that preceded them and are themselves buried beneath those that follow them. But each past day has remained

deposited in us, as, in a vast library where, even of the oldest books, there is a copy that doubtless, nobody will ever ask to see. And yet should this day from the past, traversing the translucency of the succeeding epochs, rise to the surface and spread itself inside us whom it entirely covers, then for a moment names resume their former meaning, people their former aspect, we ourselves our state of mind at the time, and we feel, with a vague suffering that however is endurable and will not last for long, the problems that long ago have become insoluble and that caused us such anguish at the time. Our ego is composed of the superimposition of our successive states. But this superimposition is not unalterable like the stratification of a mountain. Incessant upheavals raise to the surface ancient deposits.⁷⁹ I found myself as I had been after the soirée at the Princesse de Guermantes's, awaiting the arrival of Albertine.⁸⁰ What had she been doing that evening? Had she been unfaithful to me? With whom? Aimé's revelations, even if I accepted them, in no way diminished for me the anxious, despairing interest of this unexpected question, as though each different Albertine, each new memory, set a special problem of jealousy, to which the solutions of the other problems could not apply.

But I would have liked to know not only with what woman she had spent that evening, but what special pleasure that represented to her, what was happening inside her at that moment. Sometimes, at Balbec, Françoise had gone to fetch her, had told me that she had found her leaning out of her window, with an uneasy, questing air, as though she were expecting somebody. Supposing that I learned that the girl whom she was awaiting was Andrée, what was the state of mind in which Albertine awaited her, that state of mind concealed behind the uneasy, questing gaze? How important were those tastes to Albertine? How large a place did they occupy in her thoughts? Alas, remembering my own agitation, whenever I had caught sight of a girl who attracted me, sometimes when I had merely heard her mentioned without having seen her, my anxiety to look my best, to show myself to advantage, my cold sweats, I had only, in order to torture myself, to imagine the same voluptuous excitement in Albertine, as though by means of the apparatus that, after the visit of a certain practitioner who had appeared skeptical about her malady, my Aunt Léonie had wished to see invented, and which would enable the doctor to experience all the sufferings of his patient in order to understand them better. And already it was enough to torture me, if I said to myself that, compared with this other thing, her

serious conversations with me about Stendhal and Victor Hugo must have counted very little with her, to feel her heart being drawn toward other people, detaching itself from mine, implanting itself elsewhere. But even the importance that this desire must have had for her and the reserve with which she surrounded it could not reveal to me what, qualitatively, it had been, still less how she qualified it when she spoke of it to herself. In physical suffering, at least we do not have to choose our pain ourselves. The malady determines it and imposes it on us. But in jealousy we have to some extent to try out sufferings of every sort and degree, before we arrive at the one that seems appropriate. And what could be more difficult, when it is a question of a suffering such as that of feeling that she whom we loved is finding pleasure with persons different from ourselves who give her sensations that we are not capable of giving her, or who at least by their configuration, their aspect, their ways, represent to her anything but ourselves! Ah! if only Albertine had fallen in love with Saint-Loup! How much less, it seemed to me, I would have suffered!

It is true that we are unaware of the particular sensibility of each of our fellow creatures, but as a rule we do not even know that we are unaware of it, for this sensibility of other people is a matter of indifference to us. So far as Albertine was concerned, my misery or happiness would have depended upon the nature of this sensibility; I knew well enough that it was unknown to me, and the fact that it was unknown to me was already painful. The unknown desires and pleasures that Albertine felt. Once, I had the illusion of seeing these unknown desires and pleasures of Albertine's, when, some time after her death, Andrée came to see me. For the first time she seemed to me beautiful, I said to myself that her almost frizzy hair, her dark, shadowed eyes, were doubtless what Albertine had so dearly loved, the materialization before my eyes of what she used to see in her amorous reverie, of what she saw with the anticipatory eyes of desire on the day when she had so suddenly decided to leave Balbec.⁸¹ Like a strange, dark flower that was brought to me from beyond the grave,⁸² from the innermost being of a person in whom I had been unable to discover it, I seemed to see before me, the unlooked-for exhumation of a priceless relic, the incarnate Desire of Albertine that Andrée was to me, as Venus was the desire of Jupiter. Andrée mourned Albertine, but I sensed at once that she did not miss her. Forcibly removed from her friend by death, she seemed to have easily come to terms with a final separation that I would not have dared to

ask of her while Albertine was alive, so afraid would I have been of not succeeding in obtaining Andrée's consent. She seemed on the contrary to accept without difficulty this renunciation, but precisely at the moment when it could no longer be of any advantage to me. Andrée abandoned Albertine to me, but dead, and when she had lost for me not only her life but retrospectively a little of her reality, since I saw that she was not indispensable, unique to Andrée who had been able to replace her with other girls.

While Albertine was alive, I would not have dared to ask Andrée to take me into her confidence as to the nature of their friendship both mutually and with Mlle Vinteuil's friend, not being certain toward the end that Andrée did not repeat to Albertine everything that I said to her. But now such an inquiry, even if it must prove fruitless, would at least be unattended by danger. I spoke to Andrée not in a questioning tone but as though I had known all the time, perhaps from Albertine, of the fondness that Andrée herself had for women and of her own relations with Mlle Vinteuil. She admitted it all without the slightest reluctance, smiling as she spoke. From this avowal, I might derive the most painful consequences; first of all because Andrée, so affectionate and coquettish with many of the young men at Balbec, would never have been suspected by anyone of practices that she made no attempt to deny, so that by analogy, when I discovered this new Andrée, I might think that Albertine would have confessed them with the same ease to anyone other than myself, whom she felt to be jealous. But on the other hand, Andrée having been Albertine's dearest friend, and the friend for whose sake she had probably returned in haste from Balbec, now that Andrée was proved to have these tastes, the conclusion that was forced upon my mind was that Albertine and Andrée had always indulged them together. Of course, just as in a stranger's presence, we do not always dare to examine the gift that he has brought us, the wrapper of which we will not undo until the donor has gone, so long as Andrée was with me I did not retire into myself to examine the pain that she had brought me, which, I could feel, was already causing my bodily servants, my nerves, my heart, a keen disturbance that, out of good breeding, I pretended not to notice, speaking on the contrary with the utmost affability to the girl who was my guest without diverting my gaze to these internal incidents. It was especially painful to me to hear Andrée say, speaking of Albertine: "Oh yes, she always loved going to the Chevreuse valley." To the vague and

nonexistent universe in which Albertine's excursions with Andrée occurred, it seemed to me that the latter had, by a posterior and diabolical creation, added an accursed valley. I felt that Andrée was going to tell me everything that she was in the habit of doing with Albertine, and, while I endeavored from politeness, from artfulness, from self-esteem, perhaps from gratitude, to appear more and more affectionate, while the space that I had still been able to concede to Albertine's innocence became smaller and smaller, I seemed to perceive that, despite my efforts, I presented the paralyzed aspect of an animal around which a steadily narrowing circle is slowly traced by the hypnotizing bird of prey that makes no haste because it is sure of reaching when it chooses the victim that can no longer escape. I gazed at her nevertheless, and, with such liveliness, naturalness, and assurance as a person can muster who is trying to make it appear that he is not afraid of being hypnotized by the other's stare, I said casually to Andrée: "I have never mentioned the subject to you for fear of offending you, but now that we both find a pleasure in talking about her, I may as well tell you that I found out long ago all about the things of that sort that you used to do with Albertine. And I can tell you something that you will be glad to hear although you know it already: Albertine adored you." I told Andrée that it would be of great interest to me if she would allow me to see her, even if she simply confined herself to caresses that would not embarrass her unduly in my presence, performing such actions with those of Albertine's friends who shared her tastes, and I mentioned Rosemonde, Berthe,⁸³ each of Albertine's friends, in the hope of finding out something. "Apart from the fact that not for anything in the world would I do the things you mention in your presence," Andrée replied, "I do not believe that any of the girls whom you have named have those tastes." Drawing closer in spite of myself to the monster that was attracting me, I answered: "What! You don't expect me to believe that, of all your band, Albertine was the only one with whom you did that sort of thing!" "But I have never done anything of the sort with Albertine." "Come now, my dear Andrée, why deny things that I have known for at least three years, I see no harm in them, far from it. Talking of such things, that evening when she was so anxious to go with you the next day to Mme Verdurin's, you may remember perhaps . . ." Before I had completed my sentence, I saw in Andrée's eyes, which it sharpened to a pinpoint like those stones which for that reason jewelers find it difficult to use, a fleeting, worried stare, like the faces of persons privileged to go

behind the scenes who draw back the edge of the curtain before the play has begun and at once retire in order not to be seen. This uneasy stare vanished, everything had become quite normal, but I felt that anything I might see hereafter would have been specially arranged for my benefit. At that moment I caught sight of myself in the mirror; I was struck by a certain resemblance between myself and Andrée. If I had not long since ceased to shave my upper lip and had had but the faintest shadow of a moustache, this resemblance would have been almost complete. It was perhaps when she saw, at Balbec, my moustache that had scarcely begun to grow, that Albertine had suddenly felt that impatient, furious desire to return to Paris. "But I cannot, all the same, say things that are not true simply because you see no harm in them. I swear to you that I never did anything with Albertine, and I am convinced that she detested that sort of thing. The people who told you that were lying to you, probably with some ulterior motive," she said with a questioning, defiant air. "Oh, very well then, since you won't tell me," I replied, preferring to appear to be unwilling to furnish a proof that I did not possess. However, I uttered vaguely and at random the name of the Buttes-Chaumont. "I may have gone to the Buttes-Chaumont with Albertine, but is it a place that has a particularly evil reputation?" I asked her whether she could not mention the subject to Gisèle, who had at one time been on intimate terms with Albertine. But Andrée assured me that after the outrageous way in which Gisèle had behaved to her recently, asking a favor of her was the one thing that she must absolutely decline to do for me. "If you see her," she went on, "do not tell her what I have said to you about her, there is no use in making an enemy of her. She knows what I think of her, but I have always preferred to avoid having violent quarrels with her which only have to be patched up afterward. And besides, she is a dangerous person. But you can understand that when one has read the letter that I had in my hands a week ago, and in which she lied with such absolute treachery, nothing, not even the noblest actions in the world, can wipe out the memory of such a thing." In short, although Andrée had those tastes to the extent of making no pretense of concealing them, and Albertine had felt for her the great affection that she had undoubtedly felt, if Andrée had never had any carnal relations with Albertine and had never been aware that Albertine had those tastes, this meant that Albertine did not have them, and had never enjoyed with anyone those relations that, rather than with anyone else, she would have enjoyed with Andrée. And so when Andrée had left

me, I realized that her definite assertion had brought me peace of mind. But perhaps it had been dictated by a sense of the obligation that Andrée felt she owed to the dead girl whose memory still survived in her, not to let me believe what Albertine had doubtless, while she was alive, begged her to deny.

These pleasures of Albertine's that I had tried so often to imagine, I had believed for a moment, while contemplating Andrée, that I could see them, on another occasion I thought I caught their presence other than by seeing them; I thought that I heard them. I had had two young laundry girls, from a quarter where Albertine had often gone, brought to a brothel. One of them, beneath the caresses of the other, suddenly began to make a sound that at first I could not make out; for we never understand exactly the meaning of an original sound expressive of a sensation that we are not experiencing. If we hear it coming from a neighbor's room and without seeing anything, we can take for mad laughter the sound that is being torn from a patient suffering while being operated on without anesthesia; and as for the noise made by a mother who is being told that her child has just died, it can seem to us, if we do not know what is happening, as difficult to apply to a human origin as to the noise that issues from an animal or from a harp. It takes a little time to comprehend that these two noises express by analogy with what we ourselves may have felt, although very different, that we call pain, and it took me some time also to understand that this noise expressed, equally by analogy, what I had also felt that was very different and that I called pleasure;⁸⁴ and that pleasure must have been very strong to overwhelm to such a degree the person who was feeling it and to draw from her this unknown language that seems to designate and comment on all the phases of this delicious drama that the young woman was living through and that was hid from my eyes, and from the eyes of all others except for the girl herself, by the curtains that are forever lowered over what happens in the mysterious intimacy of every human being. Moreover, these two girls could tell me nothing, they did not know who Albertine was.

Novelists sometimes pretend in an introduction that while traveling in a foreign country they have met somebody who has told them the story of a person's life. They then withdraw in favor of this chance acquaintance, and the story that he tells the novelist is nothing more or less than the novel. Thus the life of Fabrice del Dongo was related to Stendhal by a canon of Padua.⁸⁵ How gladly would we, when we are in love, that is to say when

another person's existence seems to us mysterious, find some such well-informed narrator! And undoubtedly he exists. Do we not ourselves frequently relate, without any trace of passion, the story of some woman or other, to one of our friends, or to a stranger, who has known nothing of her love affairs and listens to us with keen interest? The man I was when I spoke to Bloch about the Princesse de Guermantes, about Mme Swann, that person still existed who could have spoken to me about Albertine, that person still exists . . . but we never come across him. It seemed to me that, if I had been able to find women who had known her, I would have learned everything that I did not know. And yet to strangers it must have seemed that nobody could have known as much of her life as I did. And what's more, did I not know her dearest friend, Andrée? Thus it is that we suppose that the friend of a minister must know the truth about some political affair or cannot be implicated in a scandal. Having tried and failed, the friend has found that whenever he discussed politics with the minister the latter confined himself to generalizations and told him nothing more than what had already appeared in the newspapers, or that if he was in any trouble, his repeated attempts to secure the minister's help have ended invariably in an: "It is not in my power" against which the friend is himself powerless. I said to myself: "If I could have known such and such witnesses!" from whom, if I had known them, I would probably have been unable to extract anything more than from Andrée, herself the custodian of a secret that she refused to surrender. Differing in this respect also from Swann who, when he was no longer jealous, ceased to feel any curiosity as to what Odette might have done with Forcheville, even after my jealousy had subsided, the thought of making the acquaintance of Albertine's laundry girl, of the women in her quarter, of reconstructing her life in it, her intrigues, this alone had any charm for me. And as desire always springs from a preliminary prestige, as had happened to me in the past with Gilberte, with the Duchesse de Guermantes, it was, in the quarters in which Albertine had lived in the past, the women of her background that I sought to know, and whose presence alone I could have desired. Even without my being able to learn anything from them, they were the only women toward whom I felt attracted, being those whom Albertine had known or whom she might have known, women of her own background or of the sort with which she liked to associate, in a word those women who had in my eyes the prestige of resembling her or of being of the type that had appealed to her. As I recalled thus either

Albertine herself or the type for which she had doubtless felt a preference, these women aroused in me an agonizing feeling of jealousy or regret, which afterward when my grief had subsided, changed into a curiosity not devoid of charm. And among these last, especially girls of the working class, because of that life—so different from the life that I knew—and which is theirs. No doubt it is only in our mind that we possess things, and we do not possess a painting because it hangs in our dining room if we are incapable of understanding it, or a landscape because we live in front of it without even looking at it. But still I had had in the past the illusion of recapturing Balbec, when in Paris Albertine came to see me and I held her in my arms; similarly, I obtained a contact, restricted, and furtive as it might be, with Albertine's life, the atmosphere of workrooms, a conversation across a counter, the spirit of the slums, when I kissed a working girl. Andrée, these other women, all of them in relation to Albertine—as Albertine herself had been in relation to Balbec—were to be numbered among those substitutes for pleasures, replacing one another, in a gradual degradation, which enable us to dispense with the pleasure that we can no longer obtain, a trip to Balbec, or the love of Albertine (just as going to the Louvre to look at a Titian that was originally in Venice consoles us for not being able to go there), for those pleasures that, separated one from another by indistinguishable gradations, convert our life into a series of concentric, contiguous, harmonic, and graduated zones, encircling an initial desire that has set the tone, eliminated everything that does not combine with it, and spread the dominant color (as had, for instance, happened to me also in the cases of the Duchesse de Guermantes and of Gilberte). Andrée, these women, were to the desire, the gratification of which I now knew was hopeless, to have Albertine by my side, what one evening, before I knew Albertine except by sight, had been the many-faceted and sun-drenched freshness of a bunch of grapes.⁸⁶

Associated now with the memory of my love, Albertine's physical and social attributes, in spite of which I had loved her, oriented my desire on the contrary toward what at one time it would least readily have chosen: dark-haired girls of the lower middle class. Indeed, what was beginning partially to revive in me was the immense desire that my love for Albertine had not been able to assuage, that immense desire to know life that I used to feel on the roads around Balbec, in the streets of Paris, that desire that had caused me so much suffering when, supposing it to exist in Albertine's heart also, I

had sought to deprive her of the means of satisfying it with anyone but myself. Now that I was able to endure the idea of her desire, since that idea was at once aroused by my own desire, these two immense appetites coincided, I would have liked us to be able to indulge them together, I said to myself: "That girl would have appealed to her," and led by this sudden digression to think of her and of her death, I felt too unhappy to be able to pursue my own desire any further. As, long ago, the Méséglise and Guermantes ways had established the foundations of my liking for the countryside and had prevented me from finding any real charm in a place where there was no old church, nor cornflowers, nor buttercups, so it was by attaching them in myself to a past full of charm that my love for Albertine made me seek out exclusively a certain type of woman; I began again, as before I was in love with her, to feel the need of things in harmony with her that would be interchangeable with a memory that had become gradually less exclusive. I could not have found any pleasure now in the company of a blonde and haughty duchess, because she would not have aroused in me any of the emotions that sprang from Albertine, from my desire for her, from the jealousy that I had felt of her love affairs, from my sufferings, from my grief at her death. For our sensations, in order to be strong, need to release in us something different from themselves, a sentiment that will not find its satisfaction in pleasure, but that adds itself to desire, enlarges it, makes it cling desperately to pleasure. Gradually the love that Albertine had felt for certain women ceased to cause me pain, it attached those women to my past, gave them something that was more real, as to buttercups, to hawthorn blossoms the memory of Combray gave a greater reality than to unfamiliar flowers. Even of Andrée, I no longer said to myself with rage: "Albertine loved her," but on the contrary, so as to explain my desire to myself, in a tone of affection: "Albertine loved her dearly." I could now understand the widowers whom we suppose to have found consolation and who prove on the contrary that they are inconsolable because they marry their deceased wife's sister.

Thus my waning love seemed to make new loves possible for me, and Albertine like those women long loved for themselves who, later, feeling their lover's desire grow feeble, maintain their power by contenting themselves with the role of procuresses, embellished for me, as the Pompadour for Louis XV, fresh damsels. In the past, my time had been divided into periods in which I desired this woman or that. When the

violent pleasures afforded by one had subsided, I longed for the other, who would give me an almost pure affection until the need of more sophisticated caresses brought back my desire for the first. Now these alternations had come to an end, or at least one of the periods was being indefinitely prolonged. What I would have liked was that the newcomer should take up her abode in my house, and should give me at night, before leaving me, a friendly, sisterly kiss. So that I might have believed—had I not had experience of the intolerable presence of another person—that I regretted a kiss more than a certain pair of lips, a pleasure more than a love, a habit more than a person. I would have liked also that the newcomers should be able to play Vinteuil's music to me like Albertine, to talk to me as she had talked about Elstir. All this was impossible. Their love would not be equivalent to hers, I thought, whether because a love to which were annexed all those episodes, visits to museums, evenings at concerts, a whole complicated existence that allows correspondences, conversations, a flirtation preliminary to more intimate relations, a serious friendship afterward, possesses more resources than love for a woman who can only offer herself, as an orchestra possesses more resources than a piano; or because, more profoundly, my need of the same sort of affection that Albertine used to give me, the tenderness of a girl of a certain culture who would at the same time be a sister to me, was—like my need of women of the same background as Albertine—merely a renewal of my memory of Albertine, of my memory of my love for her. And once again I discovered, first of all that memory has no power of invention, that it is powerless to desire anything else, even anything better than what we have already possessed; secondly that it is spiritual in the sense that reality cannot provide it with the state that it seeks; lastly that, when applied to a person who is dead, the resurrection that it incarnates is not so much that of the need to love, in which it makes us believe, as that of the need of the absent person. So that the resemblance to Albertine of the woman whom I had chosen, the resemblance of her tenderness, if I succeeded in winning it, to Albertine's, only made me all the more conscious of the absence of what I had been unconsciously seeking, of what was indispensable to the revival of my happiness, that is to say Albertine herself, the time during which we had lived together, the past in search of which I had unconsciously gone. Certainly, on fine days, Paris seemed to me innumerable aflour with all the girls whom I did not desire, but who thrust down their roots into the

obscurity of the desire and the mysterious nocturnal life of Albertine. It was of one like these that she had said to me at the outset, when she had not begun to distrust me: "That girl is ravishing; what pretty hair she has!" All the curiosity that I had felt about her life in the past when I knew her only by sight, and on the other hand all my desires in life were blended in this sole curiosity, to know in what manner Albertine experienced pleasure, to see her with other women, perhaps because thus, when they had left her, I would have remained alone with her, the last and the master. And seeing her hesitations, her uncertainty as to whether it would be worth her while to spend the evening with this or that girl, her satiety when the other had gone, perhaps her disappointment, I would have shed light on, I would have restored to its true proportions the jealousy that Albertine inspired in me, because seeing her thus experience them I would have taken the measure and discovered the limit of her pleasures.

Of how many pleasures, of what a pleasant life she has deprived us, I said to myself, by that stubborn obstinacy in denying her tastes! And as once again I sought to discover what could have been the reason for her obstinacy, all of a sudden the memory came to me of a remark that I had made to her at Balbec on the day when she gave me a pencil. As I reproached her for not having allowed me to kiss her, I had told her that I thought a kiss just as natural as I thought it disgusting that a woman should have relations with another woman.⁸⁷ Alas, perhaps Albertine had never forgotten that imprudent speech.

I took home with me the girls who would have appealed to me least, I stroked their virginal tresses, I admired a well-modeled little nose, a Spanish pallor. Certainly, in the past, even with a woman I had merely glimpsed on a road near Balbec, in a street in Paris, I had felt the individuality of my desire and that it would be adulterating it to seek to assuage it with another person. But life, by disclosing to me little by little the permanence of our needs, had taught me that, failing one person, we must content ourselves with another, and I felt that what I had demanded of Albertine, another woman, Mlle de Stermaria, could have given me. But it had been Albertine; and between the satisfaction of my need of affection and the distinctive features of her body, an interwoven tangle of memories had become so inextricable that I could no longer detach from a desire for tenderness all that embroidery of my memories of Albertine's body. She alone could give me that happiness. The idea of her uniqueness was no

longer a metaphysical *a priori* based upon what was individual in Albertine, as in the case of the women I passed in the street long ago, but an *a posteriori* created by the contingent and indissoluble overlapping of my memories. I could no longer desire any tenderness without feeling a need for her, without suffering from her absence. Hence the very resemblance of the woman I had chosen, of the tenderness that I asked of her, to the happiness that I had known only made me all the more conscious of all that they lacked before that happiness could revive. The same vacuum that I had found in my room since Albertine had left, and had supposed that I could fill by taking women in my arms, I found in them. They had never spoken to me, these women, of Vinteuil's music, of Saint-Simon's *Mémoires*, they had not sprayed themselves with too strong a perfume before coming to see me, they had not played at interlacing their eyelashes with mine, all of which things are important because, apparently, they allow us to weave dreams around the sexual act itself and to give ourselves the illusion of love, but in reality because they formed part of my memory of Albertine and it was she whom I wanted to find. What these women had in common with Albertine made me feel all the more clearly what was lacking of her in them, which was everything, and would never be anything again since Albertine was dead. And so my love for Albertine, which had drawn me toward these women, made me indifferent to them, and my regret for Albertine and the persistence of my jealousy, which had already outlasted my most pessimistic calculations, would perhaps never have altered appreciably, had their existence, isolated from the rest of my life, been subjected merely to the play of my memories, to the actions and reactions of a psychology applicable to immobile states, and had it not been drawn into a vaster system in which souls move in time as bodies move in space. As there is a geometry in space, so there is a psychology in time, in which the calculations of a plane psychology would no longer be accurate because we would not be taking into account Time and one of the forms that it assumes, oblivion; oblivion, the force of which I was beginning to feel and that is so powerful an instrument of adaptation to reality because it gradually destroys in us the surviving past that is a perpetual contradiction of it. And I ought really to have discovered sooner that one day I would no longer be in love with Albertine. When I had realized, from the difference that existed between what the importance of her person and of her actions was to me and what it was to other people, that my love was not so much a

love for her as a love in me, I might have deduced various consequences from this subjective nature of my love and that, being a mental state, it might easily long survive the person, but also that having no genuine connection with that person, it must, like every mental state, even the most lasting, find itself one day obsolete, be “replaced,” and that when that day came everything that seemed to attach me so sweetly, indissolubly, to the memory of Albertine would no longer exist for me. It is the misfortune of other people that they are to us merely showcases for the very perishable collections of our own mind. For this very reason we base upon them projects that have all the ardor of our mind; but our mind grows tired, our memory crumbles; the day would arrive when I would readily admit the first comer to Albertine’s room, as I had without the slightest regret given Albertine the agate marble or other gifts that I had received from Gilberte. ⁸⁸

Notes

1. See *The Guermantes Way*, 355.
2. The role of habit in controlling or influencing our actions is an important theme in this novel. See, for example, *Swann’s Way*, 9, and *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 240–41.
3. Latin, meaning in extreme circumstances.
4. The gifts offered to Albertine are similar to those that Proust offered for the return of his driver and love interest Alfred Agostinelli, with whom he fell deeply in love. Instead of a yacht, the writer offered Agostinelli an airplane and a Rolls-Royce. The young man’s ambition to become a pilot would have fatal consequences. See William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 569–72.
5. Proust inadvertently wrote Incarville station. Scott Moncrieff silently corrected this to read Parville.
6. See *The Captive*, 436.
7. See *The Captive*, 433.
8. Albertine, during her “captivity” in the Narrator’s apartment, has kept her Paris apartment. See *The Guermantes Way*, 408, and *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 145.
9. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 577.
10. Châtelleraut is not in Touraine but in the département of Vienne in Poitou. This confusion is due to Proust’s not having lived long enough to revise this portion of the novel. In earlier drafts, Albertine’s escape route was different.
11. “All our misfortunes are not worth a single glance from her eyes,” is a line from *Sonnets pour Hélène*, Book 2, sonnet 67, by Pierre de Ronsard (1524–85). In mythology, Helen was said to be the most beautiful woman in the world. In Homer’s *Iliad*, she was stolen from her husband, the Spartan king Menelaus by Paris, a prince of Troy. When the Greeks besieged Troy to rescue her, she went up upon the city walls where the old men were watching the battle below. When they looked at her, they felt no guilt and agreed that such beauty was worth fighting for. See *The Iliad*, book 3.
12. See *Swann’s Way*, 86.
13. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 165.
14. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 466.

[15.](#) On December 3, 1913, Proust sent Albert Nahmias to Nice to offer Alfred Agostinelli's father a monthly pension for the immediate return of the young man. See Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, 555–56.

[16.](#) A criminal investigation department similar to our Federal Bureau of Investigation.

[17.](#) For Gilberte's gift of the agate marble to the Narrator, see *Swann's Way*, 457.

[18.](#) Jules Massenet composed the opera *Manon* (1884) based on the novel *Manon Lescaut* by the Abbé Prévost. The libretto is by Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille. Des Grieux falls passionately in love with the girl Manon, who is being forced to enter a convent. Des Grieux arranges for her to flee with him; Manon will be repeatedly unfaithful to him. For the Narrator's opinion about the quality of this opera, see *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 236.

[19.](#) "Alas! The bird who escapes what it thinks is bondage,/Very often comes back in the night in a desperate flight, to beat against the window!" These lines are sung by Manon in act 3.

[20.](#) Des Grieux: "Manon, answer me now!" Manon: "My soul's only love!/Only today do I know the goodness of your heart . . ." These lines are from the death scene in act 5 when Manon asks Des Grieux for forgiveness.

[21.](#) See *The Captive*, 5, where Albertine is humming "Pensée d'automne," a song by Jules Massenet and Armand Sylvestre from 1897.

[22.](#) *The Swan* is a title inspired by a line from the poem that follows by Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98).

[23.](#) "A swan of former times remembers it's the one/Magnificent but hopelessly struggling to resist/For never having sung of a land in which to exist/When the boredom of the sterile winter has shone." Stéphane Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, translated and with a commentary by Henry Weinfield (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 67.

[24.](#) The lines written here are nearly verbatim from the letter that Proust wrote to Agostinelli on May 30, 1914. The young man died in an airplane crash the following day and the letter was returned to Proust unopened. See note 36 and Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 256–57.

[25.](#) This is the title and first line of a poem by Mallarmé in which the poet imagines a swan caught in the ice and unable to move. "The virginal, vibrant, and beautiful dawn," Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 67.

[26.](#) These lines are from a Mallarmé poem whose title and first line is "M'introduire dans ton histoire" (To insert myself into your story). "Tell me if I am not happy/Thunder at the hubs and rubies/To see the air that fire has pierced/With kingdoms shattered and dispersed/The wheel as if in purple dying/Of my sole chariot of evening." Mallarmé, *Collected Poems*, 82.

[27.](#) She will reappear in *Time Regained*. We recall that Proust did not live to correct the proofs of most of *The Captive* and none of *The Fugitive*.

[28.](#) All the following quotations are from Racine's *Phèdre*, act 2, scene 5.

[29.](#) "They say a prompt departure is to take you away from us, my lord."

[30.](#) "(Do you believe) I care nothing for my good name?"

[31.](#) "Madame, have you forgotten that Theseus is my father and that he is your husband?"

[32.](#) "Ah, cruel Prince, you have understood me only too well."

[33.](#) These lines are spoken by Phèdre: "You hated me more, I loved you no less./Your woes made you even more attractive."

[34.](#) This is a reference to the religious movement whose center was at the abbey at Port-Royal, where Racine was educated. Phèdre is less guilty of her crime because of the Jansenist belief that only the grace of God can save a person.

[35.](#) This former train station, now the Musée d'Orsay, in Proust's day was the place from which trains left Paris for the center and southwest of France, hence with stops in Touraine and at Châtellerault.

[36.](#) Proust is attributing to Albertine a line from Alfred Agostinelli's last letter, written shortly before the young man's fatal plane crash. The novelist used a number of phrases in his own last letter

to Agostinelli, returned to Proust because Agostinelli died on the day that he would have received it. “My dear Alfred, Thank you very much for your letter—one sentence was ravishing (crepuscular etc.).” Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 256. For more details see Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, 569–72.

[37.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 535.

[38.](#) The Bontemps’ house.

[39.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 453, where Proust gives the name as Briqueville l’Orgueille.

[40.](#) Marie-Antoinette was a farm restaurant frequented by the little band in *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*; see 524. See also *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 259–60.

[41.](#) There are two communities in the département of Calvados that contain this name: Cricqueville-en-Auge and Cricqueville-en-Bessin.

[42.](#) These are the chansons de geste “(from Latin *gesta*, deeds in the sense of historical narrative), poems of heroic and often legendary exploits situated closely in the age of Charlemagne and his immediate predecessors and successors.” *The Oxford Companion to French Literature*, compiled and edited by Sir Paul Harvey and J. E. Heseltine (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), 116.

[43.](#) Albertine lived there during her second summer on the coast. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 199, 203.

[44.](#) This is an allusion to *Un philosophe sous les toits. Journal d’un homme heureux* (A philosopher in the attic. Diary of a happy man), a novel by Émile Souvestre (1806–54).

[45.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 397.

[46.](#) In one typescript version of *The Fugitive*, Proust wrote that the rest of this chapter and the following were to be cut. According to those instructions, the narrative would resume at chapter three, *Sojourn in Venice*. These instructions were unknown until after Proust’s death, indeed until the typescript was discovered in 1986. Proust died before he could make clear what his exact intentions were. It is possible that he intended the shorter version to be published in a literary review as he had done with earlier sections of the novel. In any case, the only version that English readers have known to date is the one translated originally by Scott Moncrieff.

[47.](#) This is apparently a reference to Albertine’s having blushed when someone mentioned her bathrobe.

[48.](#) This sentence is missing from Scott Moncrieff’s translation.

[49.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 555.

[50.](#) See *Swann’s Way*, 166.

[51.](#) This is a direct reference to the guilt that Proust felt over the death of Alfred Agostinelli who was able to take flying lessons only because Proust had given him the money to do so. On June 3, 1914, Proust wrote to a friend: “Today, alas, I have the sorrowful thought that if he (Agostinelli) hadn’t met me and earned so much money from me, he wouldn’t have had the means to learn to fly.” Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 261.

[52.](#) Proust may have had in mind Chopin’s ballades, which are constructed along the lines described here; they begin with slow movements and become *furioso* at the end. See *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard [Pléiade edition], 1989), 4: 82, n. 1. Proust wrote that some of Balzac’s stories follow such a rhythm: “Bring out in Balzac (*Fille aux yeux d’or*, *Sarrazine*, *La Duchesse de Langeais*, etc.) the slow preparation, the theme that is slowly bound tighter, then the lightning strangulation of the ending.” Marcel Proust, *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. with an introduction and notes by John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1988), 80.

[53.](#) The timetable of the train varies. Later in this volume it is 1:50. Here Scott Moncrieff silently changed it to match the time given in the first volume. See *Swann’s Way*, 439, 442.

[54.](#) See the theme of matricide in *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 175–76, 565–66.

[55.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 409.

[56.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 398.

[57.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 71.

[58.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 217–18.

- [59.](#) Earlier, it was Charlus who accused the Narrator of procrastinating. See *The Captive*, 87.
- [60.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 282.
- [61.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 398–99.
- [62.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 18.
- [63.](#) A Naiad is a water nymph.
- [64.](#) Proust was perhaps thinking of the portrait *Leda with Swan* by the Italian painter Giovanni Boldini (1842–1931). While Proust was writing *The Fugitive*, he asked Maria de Madrazo if she knew whether or not artist Paul Helleu had a photograph of the painting in which a swan is seen reaching with its long neck the throat of Leda. In Greek mythology, Leda was a beautiful woman beloved of Zeus, who transformed himself into a swan in order to seduce her. See Proust, *Correspondance*, 15: 58.
- [65.](#) The earlier editions of this volume had a sentence here about the nature of time and memory: “Tout comme l’avenir, ce n’est pas tout à la fois, mais grain par grain qu’on goûte le passé.” (As with the future, it is not all at once, but grain by grain that one savors the past.) This sentence is maintained in some of the current French editions of the novel. See *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard [Pléiade edition], 1954), 3: 531.
- [66.](#) In the original, *une prise de courant* is an electric power outlet.
- [67.](#) The Franco-Prussian war ended in a humiliating defeat for France and marked the end of the Second Empire and the downfall of Napoléon III.
- [68.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 181.
- [69.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 557.
- [70.](#) This is a reference to the Buttes-Chaumont. See *The Captive*, 14, 422.
- [71.](#) Italian meaning “from the beginning,” and usually employed as a musical designation for the performer to start again at a certain point and play all the way through.
- [72.](#) This anecdote was told earlier. See *The Captive*, 220.
- [73.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 416–17, and *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 477.
- [74.](#) In Proust’s day, *Le Figaro* often published such songs. In the series *Les Berceaux*, Gabriel Fauré set to music Armand Silvestre’s poem “Le Secret”; opus 23, number 3, in D flat. The title sets off the Narrator’s association of ideas.
- [75.](#) Duc Albert de Broglie (1821–1901) was a statesman and historian who wrote articles about King Louis XV for *La Revue des Deux Mondes*. He also published a volume, *Le Secret du Roi* (The king’s secret), about the king’s secret diplomacy. The name Chaumont is evoked because the duke purchased the château de Chaumont-sur-Loire.
- [76.](#) Golgotha, also called Calvary (from Latin *calva*: “bald head,” or “skull”). Golgotha is the skull-shaped hill in Jerusalem that was the site of Jesus’ crucifixion.
- [77.](#) We have seen the Narrator’s interest in etymologies. *Calvus mons* is Latin for *mont chauve* or bald mountain, and hence the origin of Chaumont in the name of the Paris park, Buttes-Chaumont, and also of the name of the château de Chaumont.
- [78.](#) Blaise Pascal (1623–62) was a mathematician, physicist, philosopher, and writer. His famous and often quoted *Pensées* were part of a book he was planning as a defense of Christianity. The *Pensées* is a “work notable for its acute analysis of character, for many striking sayings, and for its combination of powerful and persuasive reasoning with passionate devotion. It combines also the style of the philosopher with that of the lyric poet.” *The Oxford Companion to French Literature*, 541.
- [79.](#) Proust often uses geological analogies, similar to his planetary ones, to describe the “layers” of our multiple selves. For an example of such imagery used to describe Bloch, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 352.
- [80.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 141–44.
- [81.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 575.

82. This is a possible allusion to Gérard de Nerval's sonnet "El Desdichado" (The unfortunate one), who receives a consoling flower brought to him from beyond the grave.

83. Berthe is not among the little band of girls at the beach in *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*.

84. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 12, and Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, 699.

85. This is a reference to Stendhal's highly regarded 1839 novel *La Chartreuse de Parme* (*The Charterhouse of Parma*). Fabrice del Dongo is the main character.

86. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 301.

87. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 566.

88. See *Swann's Way*, 466.

Chapter 2

Mademoiselle de Forcheville

It was not that I did not still love Albertine, but no longer in the same fashion as in the final phase. No, it was in the fashion of the earliest times, when everything connected with her, places or people, made me feel a curiosity in which there was more charm than suffering. And indeed I was well aware now that before I forgot her altogether, before I reached the initial stage of indifference, I would have, like a traveler who returns by the same route to his starting point, to traverse in the opposite direction all the sentiments through which I had passed before arriving at my great love. But these stages, these moments of the past are not immobile, they have retained the tremendous force, the happy ignorance of the hope that was then rushing toward a time that has now become the past, but which a hallucination makes us for a moment mistake retrospectively for the future. I read a letter from Albertine, in which she announced that she was coming to see me that evening, and I felt for an instant the joy of expectation. In these return journeys along the same line from a place to which we will never return, when we recognize the names, the appearance of all the stations through which we have passed on the outward journey, it happens that, while our train is halting at one of them, we feel for an instant the illusion that we are setting off again, but in the direction of the place from which we have come, as on the former journey. Soon the illusion vanishes, but for an instant we felt ourselves carried toward it once again: such is the cruelty of memory.

And yet, if we cannot, before returning to the state of indifference from which we started, dispense ourselves from covering in the opposite direction the distances that we had traversed in order to arrive at love, the trajectory, the line that we follow, are not of necessity the same. They have this in common, that they are not direct, because oblivion is no more capable than love of progressing along a straight line. But they do not of necessity take the same routes. And on the route I was following on my return journey, there were already well on the way to the destination, four stages that I particularly remember,¹ doubtless because I perceived in them

things that had no part in my love for Albertine, or at most were attached to it only to the extent to which what existed already in our heart before a great love becomes associated with it, whether by nourishing it, or by combating it, or by offering contrasts with it or images of it for one's intelligence to analyze.

The first of these stages began with the coming of winter, on a fine Sunday, which was also All Saints' Day, when I had ventured out of doors. As I came toward the Bois, I remembered with sorrow how Albertine had come back to join me from the Trocadéro, for it was the same day, only without Albertine. With sorrow and yet not without pleasure all the same, for the repetition in a minor key, in a despairing tone, of the same motif that had filled my day in the past, the absence even of Françoise's telephone message, of that arrival of Albertine, which was not something negative, but the suppression in reality of what I had recalled, of what had given the day a sorrowful aspect, made of it something more beautiful than a simple, unbroken day, because what was no longer there, what had been torn from it, remained stamped upon it as on a mold. In the Bois, I hummed phrases from Vinteuil's sonata. I was no longer hurt by the thought that Albertine had played it for me so many times, for almost all my memories of her had entered into that secondary chemical state in which they no longer cause an anxious oppression of the heart, but rather a kind of sweetness. Now and then, at the passages that she used to play most often, when she was in the habit of making some observation that I had thought charming at the time, of suggesting some reminiscence, I said to myself: "Poor girl," but without sorrow, merely adding to the musical phrase a greater value, a value that was so to speak historic and curious like that which the portrait of Charles I by Van Dyck,² so beautiful already in itself, acquires from the fact that it found its way into the national collection because of Mme du Barry's desire to impress the king.³ When the little phrase, before disappearing altogether, dissolved into its various elements in which it floated still for a moment in scattered fragments, it was not for me as it had been for Swann a messenger from Albertine who was vanishing. It was not altogether the same association of ideas that the little phrase had aroused in me as in Swann.⁴ I had been impressed, most of all, by the elaboration, the attempts, the repetitions, the "outcome" of a phrase that developed throughout the sonata as that love had developed throughout my life. And now, when I realized

how, day by day, one element after another of my love was disappearing, the jealous side of it, then some other, drifted gradually back in a vague remembrance to the first tentative beginnings, it was my love that I seemed, in the scattered notes of the little phrase, to see disintegrating before my eyes.

As I followed the paths separated by undergrowth, carpeted with a grass that diminished daily, the memory of a drive during which Albertine had been by my side in the carriage on the way home with me, during which I felt that she was enveloping my life, floated now around about me, in the vague mist of the darkening branches in the midst of which the setting sun caused to gleam, as though suspended in the empty air, a horizontal web embroidered with golden leaves. Moreover, my heart kept fluttering at every moment, as happens to anyone who is haunted by an obsession that gives to every woman who has stopped at the end of a path, the appearance, the possible identity of the woman of whom he is thinking. "Perhaps it is she!" We look around, the carriage continues on its way and we do not return to the spot. I did not merely contemplate this foliage with the eyes of memory, it interested me, touched me, like those purely descriptive pages into which an artist, to make them more complete, introduces a fiction, a whole romance; and this work of nature thus assumed the sole charm of melancholy that was capable of reaching my heart. The reason for this charm seemed to me to be that I was still as much in love with Albertine as ever, whereas the true reason was on the contrary that oblivion was continuing to make such headway in me that the memory of Albertine was no longer painful to me, that is to say, it had changed; but however clearly we may discern our impressions, as I then thought that I could discern the reason for my melancholy, we are unable to trace them back to their more remote meaning; like those maladies the history of which the doctor hears his patient relate to him, by the help of which he works back to a more profound cause, of which the patient is unaware, similarly our impressions, our ideas, have only a symptomatic value. My jealousy being held aloof by the impression of charm and sweet sadness that I was feeling, my senses reawakened. Once again, as when I had ceased to see Gilberte, the love of women arose in me, rid of any exclusive association with any particular woman already loved, and floated like those essences that have been liberated by previous destructions and stray suspended in the springtime air, asking only to be allowed to be united with a new creature. Nowhere do

there sprout so many flowers, “forget-me-nots” though they be styled, as in a cemetery. I looked at the girls with whom this fine day so countless blossomed, as I would have looked at them long ago from Mme de Villeparisis’s carriage or from the carriage in which, on a similar Sunday, I had come there with Albertine. At once, the glance that I had just cast at one or other of them was matched immediately by the curious, furtive, speculative glance, reflecting unimaginable thoughts, which Albertine would surreptitiously have cast at them and which, duplicating my own with a mysterious, swift, steel-blue wing, wafted along these paths that had hitherto been so natural, the tremor of an unknown element with which my own desire would not have sufficed to animate them had it remained alone, for it, to me, contained nothing that was unfamiliar. At times the reading of a novel that was at all sad carried me abruptly back, for certain novels are like great but temporary bereavements, they abolish habit, bring us in contact once more with the reality of life, but for a few hours only, like a nightmare, since the force of habit, the oblivion that it creates, the gaiety that it restores to us because our brain is powerless to fight against it and to recreate the truth, infinitely prevails over the almost hypnotic suggestion of a good book, which, like all suggestions, has but very transient effects. Moreover, at Balbec, when I had first longed to know Albertine, was it not because she had seemed to me representative of those girls the sight of whom had so often brought me to a standstill in the streets, on country roads, and because she might embody their life for me? And was it not natural that now the cooling star of my love in which they were condensed should disperse again in this scattered dust of nebulae?⁵ All of them seemed to me Albertines—the image that I carried inside me making me find copies of her everywhere—and indeed, at the bend of an avenue, the girl who was getting into an automobile recalled her so strongly, was so exactly of the same build, that I wondered for an instant whether it were not her that I had just seen, whether people had not been deceiving me when they sent me the report of her death. I saw her again thus at the corner of an avenue, as perhaps she had been at Balbec, getting into a car in the same way, when she was so full of confidence in life. And I did not merely record with my eyes, as one of those superficial phenomena which occur so often in the course of a walk, this other girl's action in climbing into the car: become a sort of sustained action, it seemed to me to extend also into the past in the

direction of the memory that had been superimposed upon it and that pressed so voluptuously, so sadly against my heart.

But by this time the girl had vanished. A little farther on I saw a group of three girls slightly older, young women perhaps, whose elegant and energetic allure corresponded so closely with what had attracted me on the day when I first saw Albertine and her friends that I hastened in pursuit of these three new girls and, when they stopped a carriage, looked frantically in every direction for another. I found one, but it was too late. I did not overtake them. A few days later, however, as I was coming home, I saw, emerging from the portico of our house, the three girls whom I had followed in the Bois. They were absolutely, the two dark-haired ones especially, except that they were slightly older, the type of those young society girls who so often, seen from my window or encountered in the street, had made me form a thousand plans, fall in love with life, and whom I had never been able to know. The blonde had a rather more delicate, almost an invalid air, which appealed to me less. It was she nevertheless who was responsible for my not contenting myself with gazing at them for a moment, but, becoming rooted to the ground, staring at them with a scrutiny of the sort which, by its fixity that nothing can distract, its application as though to a problem, seems to be conscious that the true object is hidden far beyond what they see. I would doubtless have allowed them to disappear as I had allowed so many others, but at the moment when they passed by me, the blonde—was it because I was scrutinizing them so closely?—darted a furtive glance at me, then, having passed me and turning her head toward me, a second glance that set me afire. However, as she ceased to pay attention to me and resumed her conversation with her friends, my ardor would doubtless have subsided, had it not been increased a hundredfold by the following detail. When I asked the concierge who they were: “They asked for Mme la Duchesse,” he informed me. “I think that only one of them knows her and that the others were simply accompanying her to the door. Here’s the name, I don’t know whether I’ve taken it down properly.” And I read: “Mlle Déporcheville,” which it was easy to correct to “d’Éporcheville,” that is to say the name, more or less, so far as I could remember, of the girl of excellent family, vaguely connected with the Guermantes, and whom Robert had told me that he had met in a house of assignation, and with whom he had had relations.⁶ I now understood the meaning of her glance, why she had turned around, without letting her

companions see. How often I had thought about her, imagining her in the light of the name that Robert had given me! And, lo and behold, I had just seen her, in no way different from her friends, except for that concealed glance that established between herself and me a secret entry into the parts of her life that, evidently, were concealed from her friends, and that made her appear more accessible—already almost half mine—more docile than girls of the aristocracy usually are. In the mind of this girl, she and I now had in common the hours that we might have spent together if she had been free to make a rendezvous with me. Was it not this that her glance had sought to express to me with an eloquence that was intelligible to me alone? My heart throbbed until it almost burst, I could not have given an exact description of Mlle d'Éporcheville's appearance, I could picture vaguely a fair complexion viewed from the side, but I was madly in love with her. All of a sudden I became aware that I was reasoning as though, of the three girls, Mlle d'Éporcheville could be only the blonde who had turned around and had looked at me twice. But the concierge had not told me this. I returned to his lodge, questioned him again, he told me that he could not enlighten me, because they had come today for the first time and while he was not there. But he would ask his wife who had seen them once before. She was busy at the moment scrubbing the service stairs. Which of us has not experienced in the course of his life these uncertainties more or less similar to mine, and all alike delicious? A charitable friend to whom we describe a girl that we have seen at a ball, concludes from our description that she must be one of his friends and invites us to meet her. But among so many girls, and with no guidance but a mere verbal portrait, may there not have been some mistake? The girl whom you are about to meet, will she not be a different girl from the one whom you desire? Or on the other hand are you not going to see holding out her hand to you with a smile precisely the girl whom you hoped that she would be? This latter case, which is frequent enough without being justified always by arguments as conclusive as this with respect to Mlle d'Éporcheville, arises from a sort of intuition and also from that wind of fortune that favors us at times. Then, on seeing her, we say to ourselves: "That is indeed the girl." I remembered that, among the little band of girls who used to parade along the beach, I had guessed correctly which one was named Albertine Simonet.⁷ This memory caused me a sharp but transient pang, and while the concierge went in search of his wife, my chief anxiety—as I thought of Mlle d'Éporcheville, and since in those

minutes spent in waiting during which a name, a piece of information that we have, we know not why, fitted to a face, finds itself free for an instant and floats among several, ready if it adheres to a new one, to make, retrospectively, the original face about which it had enlightened us strange, innocent, elusive—was that the concierge's wife was perhaps going to inform me that Mlle d'Éporcheville was, on the contrary, one of the two dark-haired girls. In that event, the being in whose existence I believed would vanish, the being whom I already loved, whom I now thought only of possessing, that blonde and sly Mlle d'Éporcheville whom the fateful answer must then separate into two distinct elements, which I had arbitrarily united after the fashion of a novelist who blends together diverse elements borrowed from reality in order to create an imaginary character, elements that, taken separately—the name failing to corroborate the supposed intention of the glance—lost all their meaning. In that case my arguments would be demolished, but how greatly they found themselves, on the contrary, strengthened when the concierge returned to tell me that Mlle d'Éporcheville was indeed the blonde girl!

From that moment I could no longer believe it was a case of homonymous names. The coincidence was too great that of these three girls one should be named Mlle d'Éporcheville, that she should be precisely (and this was the first convincing proof of my supposition) the one who had looked at me in that way, almost smiling at me, and that she should not be the one who frequented houses of assignation.

Then began a day of wild excitement. Even before starting out to buy everything that I thought necessary in order to create a favorable impression when I went to call on Mme de Guermantes two days later, when (the concierge had informed me) the young lady would be coming again to see Mme de Guermantes, in whose house I would thus find a willing girl and make a rendezvous (for I would easily be able to take her aside for a moment), I began, so as to be on the safe side, by telegraphing Robert to ask him for the girl's exact name and for a description of her, hoping to have his reply within forty-eight hours (I did not think for an instant of anything else, not even of Albertine), determined, whatever might happen to me in the interval, even if I had to be carried down in a chair were I too ill to walk, to pay a call on the duchess at the same hour. If I telegraphed Saint-Loup it was not that I had any lingering doubt as to the identity of the person, or that the girl whom I had seen and the girl of whom he had spoken

were still distinct personalities in my mind. I had no doubt whatever that they were the same person. But in my impatience at the enforced interval of forty-eight hours, it was a pleasure, it gave me already a sort of secret power over her to receive a telegram concerning her, filled with detailed information. At the telegraph office, as I drafted my message with the animation of a man who is fired by hope, I remarked how much less disconcerted I was now than in my boyhood and in facing Mlle d'Éporcheville than I had been in facing Gilberte. From the moment when I had merely taken the trouble to write out my telegram, the clerk had only to take it from me, and the swiftest channels of electric communication to transmit it across the extent of France and the Mediterranean, together with all Robert's sensual past applied to identify the person whom I had just seen in the street, would be placed at the service of the romance that I had just sketched out, and to which I need no longer give a thought, for his answer would undertake to bring it to a conclusion one way or another before twenty-four hours had passed. Whereas in the old days, brought home by Françoise from the Champs-Élysées, brooding alone in the house over my impotent desires, unable to make use of the practical devices of civilization, I loved like a savage, or indeed, for I was not even free to move about, like a flower. From this moment on I was in a continual fever; a request from my father that I go away with him for a couple of days, which would have obliged me to forgo my visit to the duchess, filled me with such rage and despair that my mother intervened and persuaded my father to allow me to remain in Paris. But for several hours my anger was unable to subside, while my desire for Mlle d'Éporcheville was increased a hundredfold by the obstacle that had been placed between us, by the fear that I had felt for a moment that those hours, at which I smiled in constant anticipation, of my call on Mme de Guermantes, as at an assured blessing of which nothing could deprive me, might not occur. Certain philosophers assert that the external world does not exist, and that it is in ourselves that we develop our life. However that may be, love, even in its humblest beginnings, is a striking example of how little reality means to us. Had I been obliged to draw from memory a portrait of Mlle d'Éporcheville, to give a description, an indication of her, or even to recognize her in the street, I would have found it impossible. I had seen her in profile, on the move, she had struck me as being simple, pretty, tall, and blonde; I could not have said anything more. But all the reflexes of desire, of anxiety, of the mortal blow struck by

the fear of not seeing her if my father took me away, all these things, associated with an image that, on the whole, I did not recognize and as to which it was enough that I knew it to be agreeable, already constituted a state of love. At last, on the following morning, after a night of happy insomnia, I received Saint-Loup's telegram: DE L'ORGEVILLE, DE PARTICLE,⁸ ORGE THE GRAIN, BARLEY, VILLE TOWN, SMALL, DARK-HAIRED, PLUMP, IS AT PRESENT IN SWITZERLAND." It was not she!

My mother had come into my room with the mail, had laid it down casually on my bed as though she were thinking of something else. And withdrawing at once to leave me by myself, she had smiled as she left the room. And I, who was familiar with my dear mother's little subterfuges and knew that one could always read the truth in her face, without any fear of being mistaken, if one took as a key to the cipher her desire to give pleasure to others, I smiled and thought: "There must be something interesting for me in the mail, and Mamma has assumed that indifferent and distracted air so that my surprise might be complete and so as not to be like the people who take away half your pleasure by telling you of it beforehand. And she had not stayed with me because she is afraid that in my pride I might conceal the pleasure that I would feel and so feel it less keenly." However, on reaching the door she had met Françoise, who was coming into the room, the telegram in her hand. As soon as she had handed it to me, my mother had forced Françoise to turn back, and had pulled her out of the room, startled, offended, and surprised. For Françoise considered that her duties conferred upon her the privilege of entering my room at any hour of the day and of remaining there if she chose. But already, on her features, astonishment and anger had vanished beneath the dark and sticky smile of a transcendent pity and a philosophical irony, a viscous liquid that was secreted, in order to heal her wound, by her outraged self-esteem. So that she might not feel herself despised, she despised us. Also she knew that we were masters, that is to say capricious creatures, who do not shine by their intelligence and take pleasure in imposing by fear upon clever people, upon servants, so as to show that they are the masters, absurd tasks such as that of boiling water in times of an epidemic, of mopping the floor of my room with a damp cloth, and of leaving it at the very moment when they intended to remain in it. Mamma had left the mail by my side, so that I might not overlook it. But I could see that there was nothing but newspapers. No

doubt there was some article by a writer whom I admired, which, as he wrote seldom, would be a surprise to me. I went to the window and drew back the curtains. Above the pale and misty daylight, the sky was all pink, as at the same hour are the newly lighted stoves in kitchens, and the sight of it filled me with hope and with a longing to pass the night in a train and awake at the little mountain station where I had seen the milkmaid with the rosy cheeks.⁹ I opened *Le Figaro*.¹⁰ What a bore! The lead article had the same title as the article that I had sent to the paper and that had not been published, but not merely the same title . . . why, there were several words absolutely identical. This was really too bad. I must write and complain. Meanwhile I could hear Françoise who, indignant at having been banished from my room, into which she considered that she had the right of entry, was grumbling: “If that isn’t a misery, a boy one saw brought into the world. I didn’t see him when his mother bore him, to be sure. But when I first knew him, to say the most, it wasn’t five years since he was birthed!” But it was not merely a few words, there was the whole thing, there was my signature at the foot. It was my article that had appeared at last! But my brain that, perhaps even at this period, had begun to show signs of age and to tire easily, continued for a moment longer to reason as though it had not understood that this was my article, just as we see old people obliged to complete a movement that they have begun even if it is no longer necessary, even if an unforeseen obstacle, in the face of which they ought at once to draw back, makes it dangerous. Then I considered the spiritual bread of life that a newspaper is, still hot and damp from the press in the murky air of the morning in which it is distributed, at break of day, to the housemaids who bring it to their masters with their café au lait, a miraculous, self-multiplying bread, which is at the same time one and ten thousand, which remains the same for each person while penetrating innumerable into every house at once.

What I was holding in my hand was not a particular copy of the newspaper, it is any one out of the ten thousand; it is not merely what had been written by me, but what had been written by me and read by everyone. To appreciate exactly the phenomenon that is occurring at this moment in the other houses, it was essential that I read this article not as its author but as one of the readers of the newspaper; for what I held in my hand was not merely what I had written, it was the symbol of its incarnation in countless minds. And so, in order to read it, it was essential that I should cease for a

moment to be its author, that I should be simply one of the ordinary readers of the paper. But then came an initial anxiety. Will the reader who has not been forewarned see this article? I open the paper absentmindedly as would such a reader, even assuming an air of not knowing what is in my paper this morning, of being in a hurry to look at the social and the political news. But my article is so long that my eyes, which are avoiding it (to remain within the bounds of truth and not to put chance on my side, as a person who is waiting counts very slowly on purpose), catches a fragment of it in passing. But many of those readers who notice the lead article and even read it do not notice the signature. I myself would be quite incapable of saying who had written the lead article of the day before. And I now promise myself that I will always read them, including the author's name, but, like a jealous lover who refrains from being unfaithful to his mistress in order to believe in her fidelity, I reflect sadly that my own future attention will not compel me, did not compel the reciprocal attention of other people. And besides there are those who have gone out hunting, those who have left the house too early. And yet some of them will read it. I do as they do, I begin. Though I am well aware that many people who read this article will find it detestable, as I am reading it the meaning conveyed by each word seems to me to be printed on the paper, and I cannot believe that every other reader on opening his eyes will not see directly the images that I see, believing—with the same naïveté as those who believe that the actual word they have uttered proceeds just as it is along the telephone wires—that the author's thoughts are directly perceived by the reader, whereas quite other thoughts form in the latter's mind; at the very moment in which I am trying to be an ordinary reader, my mind is rewriting my article. If M. de Guermantes did not understand some sentence that would appeal to Bloch, he might, on the other hand, be amused by some reflection that Bloch would scorn. Thus for each part that the previous reader seemed to abandon, a fresh admirer presenting himself, the article as a whole was praised to the skies by a swarm of readers and so prevailed over my own self-doubt since I no longer needed to bolster it. The truth of the matter is that the value of an article, however remarkable it may be, is like that of those passages in parliamentary reports in which the words: "Wait and see!" uttered by the minister, derive all their importance only from their appearing in the setting: The president of the Council, minister of the interior and of religious affairs: "Wait and see!" (Loud exclamations on the extreme Left. "Hear,

hear!” from some Left and Center benches)—an ending better than the middle and worthy of the beginning. In both cases part of the beauty—and it is the original flaw of this type of literature, from which the famous *Lundis* are not exempt—lies in the impression made on the readers. It is a collective Venus, of which we have but one truncated limb if we confine ourselves to the thought of the author, for it is fully realized only in the minds of his readers. In them it finds its fulfilment. And as a crowd, even an elite crowd, is not an artist, this final seal that it sets upon the article always retains a certain element of the commonplace. Thus Sainte-Beuve, on a Monday, could imagine Mme de Boigne¹¹ in her bed with its eight columns reading his article in the *Constitutionnel*, and appreciating some amusing thought in which he had long delighted and that might never, perhaps, have flowed from his pen had he not thought it opportune to stuff it into his article in order to make a more wide-reaching impression. No doubt the chancellor,¹² reading it for himself elsewhere, would refer to it during the visit that he would pay to his old friend a little later. And while driving him home that evening in his carriage, the Duc de Noailles¹³ in his gray trousers would tell him what had been thought of it in society, if a note from Mme d’Arbouville¹⁴ had not already informed him. And setting my own self-doubt against the ten thousand-fold approbation that now sustained me, I drew as much strength and hope for my talent from reading the article at this moment as I drew self-doubt when what I had written was addressed only to myself. I saw at that same hour, for so many people, my thought or even failing my thought, for those who were incapable of understanding it, the repetition of my name and as it were an embellished evocation of my person shine upon them, color their own thoughts in a dawn that filled me with more strength and triumphant joy than the innumerable dawn that at that moment was blushing at every window. I saw Bloch, M. de Guermantes, Legrandin, Andrée, extracting each in turn from every sentence the images that it enclosed; at the very moment when I was trying to be an ordinary reader, I was reading as an author, but not as an author only. In order that the impossible creature that I am endeavoring to be may combine all the contrary elements that might be most favorable to me, if I read as an author, I judged myself as a reader, without any of the scruples that may be felt about a written text by him who carefully compares it to the ideal that he has sought to express in it. Those phrases in my article, when I

wrote them, were so colorless in comparison with my thought, so complicated and opaque in comparison with my harmonious and transparent vision, so full of gaps that I had not managed to fill, that the reading of them was torture to me, they had only accentuated in me the sense of my own impotence and of my incurable lack of talent. But now, in forcing myself to be a reader, if I transferred to others the painful duty of judging me, I succeeded at least in making a clean sweep of what I had attempted to do in reading what I had written. I read the article forcing myself to imagine that it was written by someone else. Then all my images, all my reflections, all my epithets taken by themselves and without the memory of the failure that they represented for my ambition, charmed me by their brilliance, their amplitude, their profundity. And when I felt a weakness that was too marked taking refuge in the spirit of the ordinary and astonished reader, I said to myself: “Bah! How could a reader notice that? There is something lacking there, it’s quite possible. But good heavens, what if they aren’t satisfied! There are plenty of pretty passages, more than they are accustomed to find.”

No sooner had I finished this comforting perusal than I, who had not had the courage to reread my manuscript, wished to begin reading it again immediately, for there is nothing of which one can say more aptly than of an old article by oneself that “when one has read it one wants to read it again.”¹⁵ I decided that I would send Françoise out to buy more copies, in order to give them to my friends, I would tell her, in reality so as to hold in my hands the miracle of the multiplication of my thoughts and, as though I were another monsieur who had just opened *Le Figaro*, to read the same sentences in another copy. As it happened, I was to go that very day to see the Guermantes, whom I had not seen for ages, and where I hoped to meet Mlle d’Éporcheville, and while paying them a visit, I would find out through them what people thought of my article.

I imagined some female reader into whose room I would have loved to penetrate and to whom the newspaper would convey, if not my thought, which she would be incapable of understanding, at least my name, like a compliment to myself. But compliments paid to those whom we do not love do not enchant our heart any more than the thoughts of a mind that we are unable to penetrate reach our mind. With regard to other friends, I told myself that if the state of my health continued to grow worse and if I could no longer see them, it would be pleasant to continue to write to them so as

still to have, in that way, access to them, to speak to them between the lines, to make them share my thoughts, to please them, to be received into their hearts. I told myself this because, social relations having previously had a place in my daily life, a future in which they would no longer figure alarmed me, and because this expedient that would enable me to retain the attention of my friends and perhaps arouse their admiration, until the day when I would be well enough to begin to see them again, consoled me. I told myself this, but I was well aware that it was not true, that if I chose to imagine their attention as the object of my pleasure, that pleasure was an internal, spiritual, self-generated pleasure that they themselves could not give me, and that I could find not in conversing with them, but in writing far away from them, and that if I began to write in the hope of seeing them indirectly, so that they might have a better idea of me, so as to prepare for myself a better position in society, perhaps the act of writing would take from me any wish to see them, and I would no longer have any desire to enjoy the position in society that literature would perhaps have given me, because my pleasure would be no longer in society, but in literature.

After lunch when I went down to Mme de Guermantes, it was less for the sake of Mlle d'Éporcheville, who had been stripped, by Saint-Loup's telegram, of the better part of her personality, than in the hope of finding in the duchess herself one of those readers of my article who would enable me to form an idea of the impression that it had made on the public—subscribers and purchasers—of *Le Figaro*. It was not, however, without pleasure that I went to see Mme de Guermantes. It was all very well my telling myself that what made her house different to me from all the rest was the fact that it had for so long haunted my imagination, by knowing the reason for this difference, I did not abolish it. Moreover, the name Guermantes existed for me in many forms. If the form that my memory had merely noted, as in an address book, was not accompanied by any poetry, older forms, those that dated from the time when I did not know Mme de Guermantes, were liable to renew themselves in me, especially when I had not seen her for some time and when the glaring light of the person with human features did not quench the mysterious radiance of the name. Then once again I began to think of Mme de Guermantes's dwelling as of something that was beyond the bounds of reality, in the same way as I began to think again of the misty Balbec of my early dreams, and as though I had not since then made that journey, of the 1:22 train as though I had

never taken it. I forgot for an instant my own knowledge that none of this existed, as we think at times of a beloved friend, forgetting for an instant that he is dead. Then the idea of reality returned as I set foot in the duchess's hall. But I consoled myself with the reflection that in spite of everything it was for me the real point of intersection between reality and dreams.

On entering the drawing room, I saw the blonde girl whom I had supposed for twenty-four hours to be the girl of whom Saint-Loup had spoken to me. It was she who asked the duchess to "reintroduce" me to her. And indeed, the moment I came into the room I had the impression that I knew her quite well, which the duchess however dispelled by saying: "Oh! You have met Mlle de Forcheville before." For, on the contrary, I was certain that I had never been introduced to any girl of that name, which would certainly have struck me, so familiar was it in my memory ever since I had been given a retrospective account of Odette's love affairs and Swann's jealousy. In itself my twofold error as to the name, in having remembered "de l'Orgeville" as "d'Éporcheville" and in having reconstructed as "d'Éporcheville" what was in reality "Forcheville," was in no way extraordinary. Our mistake lies in our believing that things present themselves ordinarily as they are in reality, names as they are written, people as photography and psychology give a fixed¹⁶ notion of them. But in fact this is not at all what we ordinarily perceive. We see, we hear, we conceive the world quite topsy-turvy. We repeat a name as we have heard it spoken until experience has corrected our mistake, which does not always happen. Everyone at Combray had spoken to Françoise for twenty-five years of Mme Sazerat and Françoise continued to say "Mme Sazerin," not from that deliberate and proud perseverance in her mistakes that was habitual with her, strengthened by our contradictions, and which was all that she had added of herself to the France of Saint-André-des-Champs (of the equalitarian principles of 1789 she claimed only one civic right, that of not pronouncing words as we did and of maintaining that "hôtel," "été" and "air" were of the feminine gender), but because she really did continue to hear "Sazerin."¹⁷ This perpetual error that is precisely "life," does not bestow its thousand forms merely upon the visible and the audible universe, but upon the social universe, the sentimental universe, the historical universe, and so forth. The Princesse de Luxembourg is no better than a tart in the eyes of the chief magistrate's wife, which as it happens is of little

importance; what is slightly more important, Odette is a difficult woman to Swann, whereupon he builds up a whole romance that becomes all the more painful when he discovers his error; what is more important still, the French are thinking only of revenge in the eyes of the Germans. We have of the universe only formless, fragmentary visions, which we complete by the association of arbitrary ideas, creative of dangerous suggestions. I should therefore have had no reason to be surprised when I heard the name Forcheville (and I was already asking myself whether she was related to the Forcheville of whom I had so often heard) had not the blonde girl said to me at once, anxious no doubt to forestall tactfully questions that would have been unpleasant to her: "You don't remember that you knew me quite well long ago . . . you used to come to our house . . . your friend Gilberte. I could see that you didn't recognize me. I recognized you immediately." (She said this as if she had recognized me immediately in the drawing room, but the truth is that she had recognized me in the street and had greeted me, and later Mme de Guermantes informed me that she had told her, as something very odd and extraordinary, that I had followed her and brushed against her, mistaking her for a prostitute.) I did not learn until she had left why she was called Mlle de Forcheville. After Swann's death, Odette, who astonished everyone by her profound, prolonged, and sincere grief, found herself an extremely rich widow. Forcheville married her, after making a long tour of various châteaux and ascertaining that his family would acknowledge his wife. (The family raised certain objections but yielded to the material advantage of not having to provide for the expenses of a needy relative who was about to pass from comparative penury to opulence.) Shortly after this, one of Swann's uncles, upon whose head the successive demise of many relatives had accumulated an enormous inheritance, died, leaving the whole of his fortune to Gilberte, who thus became one of the wealthiest heiresses in France. But this was the time when in the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair there had arisen an anti-Semitic movement parallel to a more abundant movement toward the penetration of society by Jews.¹⁸ The politicians had not been wrong in thinking that the discovery of the judicial error would deal a blow to anti-Semitism. But provisionally at least a social anti-Semitism was on the contrary enhanced and exacerbated thereby. Forcheville who, like every petty nobleman, had derived from conversations in the family circle the certainty that his name was more ancient than that of La Rochefoucauld, considered that, in marrying the

widow of a Jew, he had performed the same act of charity as a millionaire who picks up a prostitute in the street and rescues her from poverty and mire. He was prepared to extend his bounty to Gilberte, whose prospects of marriage were assisted by all her millions but were hindered by that absurd name Swann. He declared that he would adopt her. We know that Mme de Guermantes, to the astonishment—which however she enjoyed and was accustomed to provoke—of her friends, had, after Swann's marriage, refused to meet his daughter as well as his wife. This refusal had been apparently all the more cruel inasmuch as what had long made marriage to Odette seem possible to Swann was the prospect of introducing his daughter to Mme de Guermantes.¹⁹ And doubtless he ought to have known, he who had already had so long an experience of life, that these pictures we form in our mind are never realized for a diversity of reasons. But among these there is one that meant that he seldom regretted his inability to bring about that introduction. This reason is that, whatever the image may be, from the trout to be eaten at sunset, which makes a sedentary man decide to take the train, to the desire to be able to astonish, one evening, the proud cashier by stopping outside her door in a magnificent carriage, which makes an unscrupulous man decide to commit murder, or to long for the death of rich relatives, according to whether he is bold or lazy, whether he follows through with his ideas or remains fondling the first link in the chain, the act that is destined to enable us to attain our fancy, whether that act be travel, marriage, crime, etc., that act modifies us so profoundly that we cease to attach any importance to the reason that made us perform it. It may even happen that there never once recurs to his mind the image that the man formed who was not then a traveler, or a husband, or a criminal, or a recluse (who has set himself to work with the idea of fame and has at the same time rid himself of all desire for fame), etc. Besides, even if we stubbornly continue to believe that our desire to act was genuine, it is probable that the effect of the sunlight would not be repeated, that feeling cold at the moment we would long for a bowl of soup by the fireside and not for a trout in the open air, that our carriage would leave unmoved the cashier who perhaps for wholly different reasons had a great regard for us and in whom this sudden opulence would arouse suspicion. In short, we have seen Swann, when married, attach importance above everything else to the relations of his wife and daughter with Mme Bontemps, etc.²⁰

To all the reasons, derived from the Guermantes way of regarding social life, which had made the duchess decide never to allow Mme and Mlle Swann to be introduced to her, we may add also that blissful assurance with which people who are not in love hold themselves aloof from what they condemn in lovers and what is explained by their love. "Oh! I don't get mixed up in all that; if it amuses poor Swann to do stupid things and ruin his life, that's his affair, but one never knows with that sort of thing, it may all end in great trouble, I leave them to clear it up for themselves." It is the *suave mari magno*²¹ that Swann himself recommended to me with regard to the Verdurins, when he had long ceased to be in love with Odette and no longer cared about the little clan. It is everything that makes so wise the judgments of third persons with regard to the passions that they do not feel and the complications of behavior that those passions bring about. Mme de Guermantes had indeed applied to the ostracism of Mme and Mlle Swann a perseverance that caused general surprise. When Mme Molé and Mme de Marsantes had begun to make friends with Mme Swann²² and to bring a large number of society ladies to see her, not only had Mme de Guermantes remained intractable but had made arrangements to burn the bridges and to see that her cousin the Princesse de Guermantes followed her example. On one of the gravest days of the crisis when, during Rouvier's Ministry²³ it was thought that there was going to be war with Germany, as I was dining with M. de Bréauté at Mme de Guermantes's, I found the duchess looking worried. I supposed that, since she was always dabbling in politics, she intended to show that she was afraid of war, as one day when she had appeared at the dinner table so pensive, barely replying in monosyllables, upon somebody's inquiring timidly what was the cause of her anxiety, she had answered with a grave air: "I am anxious about China." But a moment later Mme de Guermantes, herself volunteering an explanation of that anxious air that I had put down to fear of a declaration of war, said to M. de Bréauté: "I am told that Marie-Aynard means to establish the Swanns. I simply must go and see Marie-Gilbert tomorrow and make her help me to prevent it. Otherwise, there will be no society left. The Dreyfus Affair is all very well. But then the grocer's wife around the corner has only to call herself a nationalist and expect us to invite her to our houses in return." And I felt at this remark, so frivolous in comparison with the one I expected to hear, the same astonishment as the reader who, turning to the usual column

of the *Le Figaro* for the latest news of the Russo-Japanese war,²⁴ finds instead the list of people who have given wedding presents to Mlle de Mortemart,²⁵ the importance of an aristocratic marriage having relegated to the back of the newspaper battles on land and sea. The duchess had come in time moreover to derive from this perseverance, pursued beyond all normal limits, a satisfaction to her pride which she lost no opportunity of expressing. “Babal,” she said, “maintains that we are the two most elegant people in Paris, because he and I are the only two people who do not allow Mme and Mlle Swann to greet us. For he assures me that elegance consists in not knowing Mme Swann.” And the duchess laughed heartily.

However, when Swann was dead, it came to pass that her determination not to know his daughter had ceased to furnish Mme de Guermantes with all the satisfaction of pride, independence, self-government,²⁶ persecution that she was capable of deriving from it, which had come to an end with the passing of the man who had given her the exquisite sensation that she was resisting him, that he was unable to make her revoke her decrees. Then the duchess had proceeded to the promulgation of other decrees that, being applied to people who were still alive, could make her feel that she was free to act as she might choose. She did not think about the Swann girl, but, when anyone mentioned the girl to her, the duchess felt a curiosity, as about some place that she had never visited, which could no longer be suppressed by her desire to stand out against Swann’s pretensions. Besides, so many different sentiments may contribute to the formation of a single one that it would be impossible to say whether there was not a lingering trace of affection for Swann in this interest. No doubt—for at every level of society a worldly and frivolous life paralyzes our sensibility and robs us of the power to resuscitate the dead—the duchess was one of those people who require a personal presence—that presence which, like a true Guermantes, she excelled in protracting—in order to love truly, but also, and this is less common, in order to hate a little. So that often her friendly feeling for people, suspended during their lifetime by the irritation that some action or other on their part caused her, revived after their death. She then felt almost a longing to make reparation, because she pictured them now—though very vaguely—with only their good qualities, and stripped of the petty satisfactions, of the petty pretensions that had irritated her in them when they were alive. This imparted at times, notwithstanding the frivolity of

Mme de Guermantes, something rather noble—blended with much that was base—to her conduct. For, whereas three-fourths of the human race flatter the living and pay no attention to the dead, she often did after their death what those whom she had treated badly would have wished her to do while they were alive.

As for Gilberte, all the people who were fond of her and had a certain respect for her dignity could not rejoice at the change in the duchess's attitude toward her except by thinking that Gilberte, scornfully rejecting advances that came after twenty-five years of insults, would be able to avenge them at last. Unfortunately, moral reflexes are not always identical with what common sense imagines. A man who, by an untimely insult, thinks that he has forfeited for all time all hope of winning the friendship of a person whom he cares about, finds that, on the contrary he has thereby guaranteed it for himself. Gilberte, who remained fairly indifferent to the people who were kind to her, never ceased to think with admiration of the insolent Mme de Guermantes, to ask herself the reasons for such insolence; once indeed (and this would have made all the people who showed some affection for her die with shame on her account) she had decided to write to the duchess to ask her what she had against a girl who had never done her any harm. The Guermantes had assumed in her eyes proportions that their noble birth would have been powerless to give them. She placed them not only above all the nobility, but even above all the royal families.

Certain women who were former friends of Swann took a great interest in Gilberte. When the aristocracy learned of her latest inheritance, they began to remark how well brought up she was and what a charming wife she would make. People said that a cousin of Mme de Guermantes, the Princesse de Nièvre, was thinking of Gilberte for her son. Mme de Guermantes hated Mme de Nièvre. She announced that such a marriage would be a scandal. Mme de Nièvre took fright and swore that she had never thought of such a thing. One day, after lunch, as the sun was shining, and M. de Guermantes was going to take his wife out, Mme de Guermantes was arranging her hat in front of the mirror, her blue eyes gazing into their own reflection and at her still golden hair, her maid holding in her hand various sunshades among which her mistress might choose. The sun was flooding in through the window and they had decided to take advantage of the fine weather to pay a call at Saint-Cloud, and M. de Guermantes, ready to set off, wearing pearl-gray gloves and a top hat on his head said to

himself: "Oriane is really astounding still. I find her delicious," and went on, aloud, seeing that his wife seemed to be in a good humor: "By the way, I have a message for you from Mme de Virelef. She wanted to ask you to come on Monday to the Opéra, but as she's having the Swann girl, she did not dare and asked me to test the waters. I am not expressing any opinion, I am simply conveying the message. But really, it seems to me that we might, . . ." he added evasively, for their attitude toward anyone else being a collective attitude and taking an identical form in each of them, he knew from his own feelings that his wife's hostility to Mlle Swann had subsided and that she was curious to meet her. Mme de Guermantes settled her veil to her liking and chose a sunshade. "Just as you like, what difference do you suppose it can make to me? I see no objection to our meeting the girl. I simply did not wish that we should appear to be countenancing the dubious establishments of our friends. That is all." "And you were perfectly right," replied the duke. "You are wisdom incarnate, Madame, and what's more, you are ravishing in that hat." "You are very kind," said Mme de Guermantes with a smile at her husband as she made her way to the door. But, before entering the carriage, she felt it her duty to give him a further explanation: "There are plenty of people now who call upon the mother, besides she has the sense to be ill for nine months of the year. It seems that the child is quite charming. Everybody knows that we were very fond of Swann. People will think it quite natural." And they set off together for Saint-Cloud.

A month later, the Swann girl, who had not yet taken the name of Forcheville, came to lunch with the Guermantes. They discussed every conceivable subject; at the end of the meal, Gilberte said timidly: "I believe you knew my father quite well." "Why of course we did," said Mme de Guermantes in a melancholy tone that proved that she understood the daughter's grief and with a deliberate excess of intensity that gave her the air of concealing the fact that she was not sure whether she did remember the father. "We knew him quite well, I remember him *quite well*." (As indeed she might, seeing that he had come to see her almost every day for twenty-five years.) "I know quite well who he was, let me tell you," she went on, as though she were seeking to explain to the daughter whom she had had for a father and to give the girl information about him, "he was a great friend of my mother-in-law and besides he was very close to my brother-in-law Palamède." "He used to come here too, indeed he used to

come to lunch here,” added M. de Guermantes with an ostentatious modesty and a scrupulous exactitude. “You remember, Oriane. What a fine man your father was! One felt that he must come of a respectable family; for that matter I saw once, long ago, his own father and mother. They and he, what worthy people!” One felt that if they had, parents and son, been still alive, the Duc de Guermantes would not have had a moment’s hesitation in recommending them for a post as gardeners. And this is how the Faubourg Saint-Germain speaks to any bourgeois of the other bourgeois, whether in order to flatter him with the exception made—during the course of the conversation—in favor of the listener, or rather and at the same time in order to humiliate him. Thus it is that an anti-Semite in addressing a Jew, at the very moment when he is smothering him in affability, speaks evil of Jews, in a general fashion that enables him to be wounding without being rude.

But while she could shower compliments upon you, when she met you, and could then never bring herself to let you take your leave, Mme de Guermantes was also a slave to this need of personal contact. Swann might have managed, now and then, in the excitement of conversation, to give the duchess the illusion that she was genuinely fond of him, but he could do so no longer. “He was charming,” said the duchess with a wistful smile and fastening upon Gilberte a kindly gaze that would at least, supposing the girl to have delicate feelings, show her that she was understood, and that Mme de Guermantes, had the two been alone together and had circumstances allowed it, would have loved to reveal to her all the depth of her own feelings. But M. de Guermantes, whether because he was indeed of the opinion that the circumstances forbade such effusions, or because he considered that any exaggeration of sentiment was a matter for women and that men had no more part in it than in the other feminine attributions, except food and wine which he had reserved to himself, knowing more about them than the duchess, felt it incumbent upon him not to encourage, by taking part in it, this conversation to which he listened with a visible impatience. Moreover, Mme de Guermantes, when this outburst of sensibility had subsided, added with a worldly frivolity, addressing Gilberte: “Why, he was not only a great friend of my brother-in-law Charlus, he was also a great favorite at Voisenon” (the château of the Prince de Guermantes), not only as though Swann’s acquaintance with M. de Charlus and the prince had been a mere accident, as though the duchess’s

brother-in-law and cousin were two men with whom Swann had happened to become friends through some special circumstance, whereas Swann had been on friendly terms with all the people in that set, and as though Mme de Guermantes were seeking to make Gilberte understand who, more or less, her father had been, to “place” him by one of those characteristic sketches by which, when we seek to explain how it is that we happen to know somebody whom we would not naturally know, or to give an additional point to our story, we name the sponsors by whom a certain person was introduced. As for Gilberte, she was all the more glad to see that the subject was dropped, in that she herself was anxious only to change it, having inherited from Swann his exquisite tact combined with an intellectual charm that was recognized and appreciated by the duke and duchess, who invited her to come again soon. Moreover, with the minute observation of people whose lives have no purpose, they would discern, one after another, in the people with whom they associated, qualities of the simplest kind, exclaiming at them with the naïve amazement of a townsman who on going into the country discovers a blade of grass, or on the contrary magnifying as with a microscope, making endless comments, taking offense at the slightest faults, and often applying both processes alternately to the same person. In Gilberte’s case it was first of all upon her agreeable qualities that the idle perspicacity of M. and Mme de Guermantes was brought to bear: “Did you notice the way she pronounces certain words?” the duchess said to her husband after the girl had left them; “it was just like Swann, I seemed to hear him speaking.” “I was just about to say that, Oriane.” “She is witty, she has the same turn of phrase as her father.” “I consider that she is even far superior to him. Think how well she told that story about the sea bathing, she has a vivacity that Swann never had.” “Oh! but he was, after all, quite witty.” “I am not saying that he was not witty, I say that he lacked vivacity,” said M. de Guermantes in a blustering tone, for his gout made him irritable, and when he had no one else upon whom to vent his irritation, it was to the duchess that he displayed it. But being incapable of any clear understanding of its causes, he preferred to adopt an air of being misunderstood.

This friendly attitude on the part of the duke and duchess meant that, from now on, people might at the most say “your poor father” to Gilberte, which, for that matter, was quite unnecessary, since it was just about this time that Forcheville adopted the girl. She addressed him as “Father,”

charmed all the dowagers by her politeness and distinction, and it was acknowledged that, if Forcheville had behaved admirably toward her, the girl was goodhearted and knew how to reward him for his pains. Doubtless because she was able, now and then, and desired to show herself quite at her ease, she had reintroduced herself to me and had spoken to me about her true father. But this was an exception and no one now dared utter the name Swann in her presence. I had just caught sight, in the drawing room, of two sketches by Elstir that formerly had been banished to a little room upstairs where it was only by chance that I had seen them. Elstir was now in fashion, Mme de Guermantes could not forgive herself for having given so many of his paintings to her cousin, not because they were in fashion, but because she now appreciated them. Fashion is, indeed, composed of the enthusiasm of a number of people of whom the Guermantes are typical. But she could not dream of buying others of his paintings, for they had begun some time ago to fetch absurdly high prices. She was determined to have something, at least, by Elstir in her drawing room and had brought down these two drawings that, she declared, she “preferred to his paintings.” Gilberte recognized the technique. “One would say they’re by Elstir,” she said. “Why, yes,” replied the duchess without thinking, “it was, as a matter of fact, your fa . . . some friends of ours who made us buy them. They are admirable. To my mind, they are superior to his paintings.” I who had not heard this conversation went closer to one of the drawings to examine it. “Why, this is the Elstir that . . .” I saw Mme de Guermantes’s desperate signals. “Ah, yes, the Elstir that I admired upstairs. It shows far better here than in that corridor. Speaking of Elstir, I mentioned him yesterday in an article in *Le Figaro*. Did you happen to read it?” “You have written an article in *Le Figaro*?” exclaimed M. de Guermantes with the same violence as if he had exclaimed: “Why, she is my cousin.” “Yes, yesterday.” “In *Le Figaro*, you are certain? That is a great surprise. Because we each of us get our *Figaro*, and if one of us had missed it, the other would certainly have noticed it. That is so, isn’t it, Oriane, there was nothing in the paper.” The duke sent for *Le Figaro* and only yielded to the evidence of his own eyes, as though, previously, the probability had been that I had made a mistake as to the newspaper for which I had written. “What’s that? I don’t understand, do you mean to say, you have written an article in *Le Figaro*,” said the duchess, making an effort in order to speak of something that did not interest her. “Come, Basin, you can read it afterward.” “No, the Duke looks

so nice like that with his great beard sweeping over the paper,” said Gilberte. “I will read it as soon as I am at home.” “Yes, he wears a beard now that everybody is clean-shaven,” said the duchess, “he never does anything like other people. When we were first married, he shaved not only his beard but his moustache as well. The peasants who didn’t know him by sight thought that he couldn’t be French. He was called at that time the Prince des Laumes.” “Is there still a Prince des Laumes?” asked Gilberte, who was interested in everything that concerned the people who had refused to greet her during all those years. “Why, no!” the duchess replied with a melancholy, caressing gaze. “Such a charming title! One of the finest titles in France!” said Gilberte, a certain sort of banality emerging inevitably, as a clock strikes the hour, from the lips of certain quite intelligent persons. “Yes, indeed, I regret it too. Basin would have liked his sister’s son to take it, but it is not the same thing; after all it would be possible, since it is not necessarily the eldest son, the title may pass to a younger brother. I was telling you that in those days Basin was clean-shaven; one day, at a pilgrimage—you remember, my dear,” she turned to her husband, “that pilgrimage at Paray-le-Monial²⁷—my brother-in-law Charlus, who always enjoys talking to peasants, was saying to one after another: ‘Where do you come from?’ and as he is extremely generous, he would give them something, take them off to have a drink. For nobody was ever at the same time simpler and more haughty than Mémé. You’ll see him refuse to bow to a duchess whom he doesn’t think duchessy enough, and shower compliments upon a kennel keeper. And so, I said to Basin: ‘Come, Basin, say something to them too.’ My husband, who is not always very inventive . . .” (“Thank you, Oriane,” said the duke, without interrupting his reading of my article in which he was immersed) “. . . approached one of the peasants and repeated his brother’s question in so many words: ‘Where do you come from?’ ‘I am from Les Laumes.’²⁸ ‘You are from Les Laumes? Why, I am your Prince.’ Then the peasant looked at Basin’s smooth face and replied: ‘S not true. You’re an English.’”²⁹

One saw thus in these little anecdotes told by the duchess those great and eminent titles, such as that of the Prince des Laumes, rise to their true position, in their original state and their local color, as in certain Books of Hours one sees, amid the mob of the period, the steeple of Bourges.³⁰ Some visiting cards, which a footman had just left at the door, were brought to

her. "I can't think what has come over her, I don't know her. It is to you that I am indebted for this, Basin. Not that this sort of acquaintances has done you any good, my poor dear," and, turning to Gilberte: "I really don't know how to explain to you who she is, you certainly have never heard of her, she calls herself Lady Rufus Israel." Gilberte flushed crimson: "I do not know her," she said (which was all the more untrue in that Lady Israel and Swann had been reconciled two years before the latter's death and she addressed Gilberte by her given name), "but I know quite well, from hearing about her, who it is that you mean."³¹ The truth is that Gilberte had become a great snob. For example, another girl having one day, whether out of malice or of tactlessness, asked her what was the name of her real—not her adoptive—father, in her confusion, and as though to denaturalize a little what she had to say, instead of pronouncing the name as "Souann"³² she said "Svann," a change, as she soon realized, for the worse, since it made this name of English origin a German name. And she had even gone on to say, abasing herself so as to rise higher: "All sorts of stories have been told about my birth, but I am not supposed to know anything about that."

Ashamed as Gilberte must have felt at certain moments, when she thought of her parents (for even Mme Swann represented for her, and was, a good mother), of such an attitude toward life, we must, alas, bear in mind that its elements were borrowed doubtless from her parents, for we do not create the whole of our own personality. But with a certain quantity of egoism that exists in the mother, a different egoism, inherent in the father's family, is combined, which does not invariably mean that it is added, nor even precisely that it serves as a multiple, but rather that it creates a new egoism infinitely stronger and more redoubtable. And ever since the world began, ever since families in which some defect exists in one form have been intermarrying with families in which the same defect exists in another, thereby creating a peculiarly complex and detestable variety of that defect in the offspring, the accumulated egoisms (to confine ourselves, for the moment, to this defect) would have acquired such force that the whole human race would have been destroyed, did not the malady itself beget, with the power to reduce it to its true dimensions, natural restrictions analogous to those that prevent the infinite proliferation of the infusoria from destroying our planet, the unisexual fertilization of plants from bringing about the extinction of the vegetable kingdom, etc.³³ From time to

time a virtue combines with this egoism to produce a new and disinterested force. The combinations by which, in the course of generations, moral chemistry thus stabilizes and renders harmless the elements that were becoming too formidable, are infinite and would give an exciting variety to family history. Moreover, with these accumulated egoisms such as must have been embodied in Gilberte, there coexists some charming virtue of the parents; it appears for a moment to perform an interlude by itself, to play its touching part with complete sincerity. No doubt Gilberte did not always go so far as when she insinuated that she was perhaps the natural daughter of some great personage, but as a rule she concealed her origin.³⁴ Perhaps it was simply too painful for her to confess it and she preferred that people should learn of it from others. Perhaps she really believed that she was hiding it, with that uncertain belief that at the same time is not doubt, which reserves a possibility for what we would like to think true, of which Musset furnishes an example when he speaks of Hope in God.³⁵

“I do not know her personally,” Gilberte went on. Did she after all, when she called herself Mlle de Forcheville, hope that people would not know that she was Swann’s daughter? Some people, perhaps, who, she hoped, would in time become everybody. She could not be under any illusion as to their number at the moment, and knew doubtless that many people must be whispering: “Isn’t that Swann’s daughter?” But she knew it only with that information that tells us of people taking their lives in desperation while we are going to a ball, that is to say a remote and vague information for which we are at no pains to substitute a more precise knowledge, founded upon a direct impression. As distance makes things smaller, more uncertain, less dangerous, Gilberte preferred not to be near other people at the moment when they made the discovery that she was by birth a Swann. Gilberte belonged, during these years at least, to the most widespread variety of the human ostrich, the kind that buries its head in the hope not of not being seen, which it considers hardly probable, but of not seeing that other people see it, which seems to it something to the good and enables it to leave the rest to chance. And as we are near the people whom we picture to ourselves, as we can picture people reading their newspaper, Gilberte preferred the papers to call her Mlle de Forcheville. It is true that with the writings for which she herself was responsible, her letters, she prolonged the transition for some time by signing herself “G. S. Forcheville.” The real hypocrisy in this signature was made manifest by the suppression not so

much of the other letters of the name “Swann” as of those of the word “Gilberte.” In fact, by reducing the innocent given name to a simple “G,” Mlle de Forcheville seemed to insinuate to her friends that the similar amputation applied to the name “Swann” was due equally to the necessity of abbreviation. Indeed she gave a special importance to the “S,” making of it a sort of long tail that ran across the “G,” but which one felt to be transitory and destined to disappear like the tail that, still long in the monkey, has ceased to exist in man.

In spite of all this, in her snobbishness, there remained something of Swann’s intelligent curiosity. I remember that, during this same afternoon, she asked Mme de Guermentes whether she could meet M. du Lau, and that when the duchess replied that he was an invalid and never went out, Gilberte asked what sort of man he was, for, she added with a faint blush, she had heard a great deal about him. (The Marquis du Lau had indeed been one of Swann’s most intimate friends before the latter’s marriage, and Gilberte may have caught a glimpse of him, but at a time when she was not interested in such people.) “Would M. de Bréauté or the Prince d’Agrigente be at all like him?” she asked. “Oh! not in the least,” exclaimed Mme de Guermentes, who had a keen sense of these provincial differences and drew portraits that were sober, but colored by her husky, golden voice, beneath the gentle blossoming of her violet eyes. “No, not in the least. Du Lau was every inch the Périgord squire, charming, with all the good manners and sans gêne³⁶ of his province. At Guermentes, when we had the King of England,³⁷ with whom du Lau was on the friendliest terms, we used to have a little meal after the men came in from shooting . . . It was the hour when du Lau was in the habit of going to his room to take off his boots and put on big woolen slippers. Very well, the presence of King Edward³⁸ and all the grand dukes did not disturb him in the least, he came down to the great hall at Guermentes in his woolen slippers; he felt that he was the Marquis du Lau d’Allemans who had no reason to stand on ceremony with the King of England. He and that charming Quasimodo de Breteuil, they were the two that I liked best. They were, for that matter, great friends of . . .” (she was about to say, “your father” and stopped short). “No, there is no resemblance at all, either to Gri-gri, or to Bréauté. He was the genuine grand seigneur from Périgord. Incidentally, Mémé quotes a page from Saint-Simon about a Marquis d’Allemans, it is just like him.” I quoted the opening words of the

portrait: “M. d’Allemans who was a man of great distinction among the nobility of Périgord, by his own birth and by his merit, and was regarded by every soul alive there as a general arbiter to whom each had recourse because of his probity, his capacity, and the suavity of his manners, as it were the cock of his province.”³⁹ “Yes, he’s like that,” said Mme de Guermantes, “all the more so as du Lau was always as red as a cock.” “Yes, I remember hearing that description quoted,” said Gilberte, without adding that it had been quoted by her father, who was, indeed, a great admirer of Saint-Simon.⁴⁰

She liked also to speak of the Prince d’Agrigente and of M. de Bréauté, for another reason. The Prince d’Agrigente was prince by inheritance from the House of Aragon, but his seigneurie was in Poitou.⁴¹ As for his château, the one, that is to say, in which he resided, it was not the property of his own family, but had come to him from his mother’s first husband, and was situated almost halfway between Martinville and Guermantes. And so Gilberte spoke of him and of M. de Bréauté as of country neighbors who reminded her of her old province. Strictly speaking there was an element of falsehood in this attitude, since it was only in Paris, through the Comtesse Molé, that she had come to know M. de Bréauté, albeit he had been an old friend of her father’s. As for her pleasure in speaking of the country around Tansonville, it may have been sincere. Snobbishness is, with certain people, analogous to those pleasant beverages with which they mix nutritious substances. Gilberte took an interest in some lady of fashion because she possessed priceless books and portraits by Nattier⁴² that my former friend would probably not have taken the trouble to inspect in the Bibliothèque Nationale⁴³ or in the Louvre, and I imagine that in spite of their even greater proximity, the magnetic influence of Tansonville would have had less effect in drawing Gilberte toward Mme Sazerat or Mme Goupil than toward M. d’Agrigente. “Oh! poor Babal and poor Gri-gri,” said Mme de Guermantes, “they are in a far worse state than du Lau, I’m afraid they haven’t long to live, either of them.”

When M. de Guermantes had finished reading my article, he paid me compliments that, however, he took care to qualify. He regretted the slightly hackneyed style in which there were “pomposity, metaphors as in the antiquated prose of Chateaubriand”; on the other hand he congratulated me wholeheartedly for “keeping busy”: “I like a man to do something with his

ten fingers. I do not like the useless creatures who are always self-important or fidgety. A fatuous breed!”

Gilberte, who was acquiring with extreme rapidity the ways of society, declared how proud she would be to say that she was the friend of an author. “You can imagine that I will tell people that I have the pleasure, the *honor* of your acquaintance.”

“You wouldn’t care to come with us, tomorrow, to the Opéra-Comique?” the duchess asked me; and I thought that it would be doubtless in that same baignoire⁴⁴ in which I had beheld her the first time,⁴⁵ and which had seemed to me then as inaccessible as the underwater realm of the Nereids.⁴⁶ But I replied in a melancholy tone: “No, I am not going to the theater just now; I have lost a friend to whom I was greatly attached.” The tears almost came to my eyes as I said this, and yet, for the first time, I felt a sort of pleasure in speaking of my bereavement. It was from this moment that I began to write to all my friends that I had just experienced great sorrow, and to cease to feel it.

When Gilberte had gone, Mme de Guermantes said to me: “You did not understand my signals, I was trying to hint to you not to mention Swann.” And, as I apologized: “But I quite understand. I was on the point of mentioning him myself, I stopped short just in time, it was terrible, fortunately, I bridled my tongue. You know, it is very awkward,” she said to her husband, seeking to mitigate my own error by appearing to believe that I had yielded to a propensity common to everyone, and difficult to resist.

“What do you expect me to do,” replied the duke. “You have only to tell them to take those drawings upstairs again, since they make you think about Swann. If you don’t think about Swann, you won’t speak about him.”

On the following day I received two congratulatory letters that surprised me greatly, one from Mme Goupil, whom I had not seen for many years and to whom, even at Combray, I had not spoken more than twice. A lending library had given her the chance of seeing *Le Figaro*. Thus, when anything occurs in our life which makes some stir, messages come to us from people situated so far outside the zone of our acquaintance, our memory of whom is already so remote that these people seem to be placed at a great distance, especially in the dimension of depth. A forgotten friendship of our school days, which has had a score of opportunities of recalling itself to our mind, gives us a sign of life, although sometimes with negative results. For example, Bloch, from whom I would have so loved to know what he

thought of my article, did not write to me. It is true that he had read the article and was to admit it later, but by a counterstroke. In fact, he himself contributed, some years later, an article to *Le Figaro* and was anxious to inform me immediately of the event. Since what he regarded as a privilege had fallen to him as well, the envy that had made him pretend to ignore my article ceased, as though by the lifting of a compressor, and he spoke to me about it but not at all in the way in which he hoped to hear me mention his article: "I knew that you too," he told me, "had written an article. But I did not think that I ought to mention it to you, for fear of hurting your feelings, because we ought not to speak to our friends of the humiliating things that happen to them. And it is obviously humiliating to write in the organ of the saber and aspergillum about *five-o'clocks*,⁴⁷ not to mention the holy-water-stoup." His character remained unaltered, but his style had become less precious, as happens to certain writers who shed their mannerisms, when, ceasing to compose symbolist poetry, they take to writing serial novels.

To console myself for his silence, I read Mme Goupil's letter again; but it was lacking in warmth, for if the aristocracy employ certain formulas that form a palisade, between the initial *Monsieur* and the *sentiments distingués* of the close, cries of joy, of admiration may spring up like flowers, and their clusters waft over the barriers their entrancing fragrance. But bourgeois conventionality enwraps even the content of letters in a net of *votre succès si légitime*,⁴⁸ at best *votre beau succès*.⁴⁹ Sisters-in-law, faithful to their upbringing and tight-laced in their respectable stays, think that they have overflowed into the most distressing enthusiasm if they have written: *mes meilleures pensées*.⁵⁰ *Mère se joint à moi*⁵¹ is a superlative with which we are seldom indulged. I received another letter as well as Mme Goupil's, but the name Sautton was unknown to me. It was a plebian hand, a charming style. I regretted being unable to discover who had written to me.

Two days later I was delighted to learn that Bergotte was a great admirer of my article and had been unable to read it without envy. But a moment later my joy ceased. In fact, Bergotte had written me nothing at all. I had simply asked myself whether he would have liked the article, fearing that he would not. To the question that I was asking myself, Mme de Forcheville had replied that he admired it enormously, considered it the work of a great writer. But she had told me this while I slept: it was a dream. Almost all our dreams respond thus to the questions that we put to ourselves with

complicated statements, productions with several characters on the stage, which however lead to nothing.

As for Mlle de Forcheville, I could not help feeling sad when I thought of her. What? The daughter of Swann whom he would so have loved to see at the Guermantes', for whom they had refused their great friend the favor of an invitation, they had now sought out of their own accord, time having passed, time that renews everything for us, that instills a new personality, based upon what we have been told about them, into people whom we have not seen for a long time, during which we ourselves have grown a new skin and acquired other tastes. But when, to his daughter, Swann used to say at times as he hugged her and kissed her: "It is a great comfort, my darling, to have a child like you; one day when I am no longer here, if people still mention your poor papa, it will be only to you and because of you." Swann in placing thus after his own death a timorous and anxious hope of his survival in his daughter was as greatly mistaken as the old banker, who having made a will in favor of a little dancer whom he is keeping and who behaves admirably, tells himself that he is nothing more to her than a great friend, but that she will remain faithful to his memory. She did behave admirably, even while her feet under the table sought the feet of those of the old banker's friends who attracted her, but all this was concealed, beneath an excellent exterior. She will wear mourning for the worthy man, will feel that she is well rid of him, will enjoy not only the ready money, but the real estate, the automobiles that he has bequeathed to her, taking care to remove the monogram of the former owner, which makes her feel slightly ashamed, and with her enjoyment of the gift will never associate any regret for the giver. The illusions of paternal love are perhaps no less deceiving than those of the other kind; many daughters regard their fathers merely as the old man who will leave them his fortune. Gilberte's presence in a drawing room, instead of being an occasion for people to speak from time to time of her father, was an obstacle in the way of people's seizing those opportunities, more and more rare, that they might still have had of referring to him. Even in connection with the things that he had said, the presents that he had given, people acquired the habit of not mentioning him, and she who ought to have kept his memory young, if not perpetuated it, found herself hastening and completing the work of death and oblivion.

And it was not only with regard to Swann that Gilberte was gradually completing the work of oblivion, she had accelerated in me that work of

oblivion with regard to Albertine. Under the action of desire, and consequently of the desire for happiness that Gilberte had aroused in me during those few hours in which I had supposed her to be someone else, a certain number of miseries, of painful preoccupations, which only a little while earlier had obsessed my mind, had been released, carrying with them a whole block of memories, probably long since crumbled and become precarious, with regard to Albertine. For if many memories, which were connected with her, had at the outset helped to keep alive in me my grief for her death, in return that grief had itself fixed those memories. So that the modification of my sentimental state, prepared no doubt obscurely day by day by the continuous disintegration of oblivion, but realized abruptly as a whole, gave me the impression that I remember having felt that day for the first time, of a void, of the suppression in me of a whole portion of my associations of ideas, such as a man feels in whose brain an artery, old and worn, has burst, so that a whole section of his memory is abolished or paralyzed. I no longer loved Albertine. At most, on certain days, when the weather was of the kind that, by modifying, awakening our sensibility, brings us back into relationship with the real, I felt painfully sad in thinking of her. I was suffering from a love that no longer existed. Thus do amputees, in certain kinds of weather, feel pain in the leg they have lost.

The disappearance of my suffering and of all that it carried away with it left me diminished, as often does the recovery from an illness that occupied a large place in our life. No doubt it is because memories are not always true that love is not eternal, and because life is made up of a perpetual renewal of our cells. But this renewal, in the case of memories, is nevertheless retarded by our attention that arrests, that fixes a moment that is bound to change. And since it is the case with grief as with the desire for women that we increase it by thinking about it, the fact of having plenty of other things to do should, like chastity, make oblivion easier.

By another reaction (albeit it was the distraction—the desire for Mlle d'Éporcheville—that had made my forgetting suddenly apparent and perceptible), if the fact remains that it is time that gradually brings oblivion, oblivion does not fail to alter profoundly our notion of time. There are optical errors in time as there are in space. The persistence within me of an old impulse to work, to make up for lost time, to change my way of life, or rather to begin to live, gave me the illusion that I was still as young as in the past; and yet the memory of all the events that had succeeded one another in

my life (and also of those that had succeeded one another in my heart, for when we have greatly changed, we are misled to suppose that we have lived longer) in the course of those last months of Albertine's existence, had made them seem to me much longer than a year, and now this oblivion of so many things, separating me by gulfs of empty space from quite recent events that they made me think remote, because I had had what is called "the time" to forget them, by its fragmentary, irregular interpolation in my memory—like a thick fog at sea that obliterates all the landmarks—confused, dislocated my sense of distances in time, contracted in one place, extended in another, and made me suppose myself now farther away from things, now far closer to them than I really was. And as in the new spaces, as yet unexplored, that extended before me, there would be no more trace of my love for Albertine than there had been, in the time lost that I had just traversed, of my love for my grandmother, my life appeared to me—offering a succession of periods in which, after a certain interval, nothing of what had sustained the previous period survived in the one that followed—as something so devoid of the support of an individual, identical, and permanent self, something as useless in the future as it was protracted in the past, something that death might just as well put an end to here or there, without in the least concluding it, as with those courses of French history that, in the rhetoric class, stop short indifferently, according to the whim of the curriculum or the professor, at the Revolution of 1830,⁵² or at that of 1848,⁵³ or at the end of the Second Empire.⁵⁴

Perhaps then the fatigue and sadness that I was feeling were due not so much to my having loved in vain what I was already forgetting as from my beginning to take pleasure in the company of new living people, purely social figures, mere friends of the Guermantes, offering no interest in themselves. It was easier perhaps to reconcile myself to the discovery that she whom I had loved was nothing more, after a certain interval of time, than a pale memory, than to the rediscovery in myself of that futile activity that makes us waste time in decorating our life with a human vegetation that is vivacious but parasitic, which likewise will become nothing when it is dead, which already is alien to all that we have ever known, which, nevertheless, our garrulous, melancholy, frivolous senility seeks to attract. The newcomer who would find it easy to endure the prospect of life without Albertine had made his appearance in me, since I had been able to speak of her at Mme de Guermantes's in the language of grief without any real

suffering. These new selves, which were to bear each a different name from the preceding one, the possibility of their coming had, by reason of their indifference to the object of my love, always alarmed me, long ago in connection with Gilberte, when her father told me that if I went to live in Oceania I would never wish to return,⁵⁵ quite recently when I had read with such a pang in my heart the *Memoirs* of a mediocre writer who, separated by the events of life from a woman whom he had adored when he was young, as an old man meets her without pleasure, without any desire to see her again. Now, on the contrary, he was bringing me with oblivion an almost complete elimination of suffering, a possibility of comfort, this person so dreaded, so beneficent who was none other than one of those spare selves whom destiny holds in reserve for us, and which, without paying any more heed to our entreaties than a clear-sighted and so all the more authoritative physician, it substitutes in spite of us, by an opportune intervention, for the self that has been too seriously injured. This alteration, as it happens, nature performs from time to time, like the decay and renewal of our tissues, but we notice this only if the former self contained a great grief, a painful foreign body, which we are surprised to find no longer there, in our amazement at having become another person to whom the sufferings of his predecessor are nothing more than the sufferings of a stranger, of which we can speak with compassion because we do not feel them. Indeed, we are unaffected by our having undergone all those sufferings, since we have only a vague memory of having suffered them. It is possible that similarly our nightmares are terrifying. But when we awake we are another person who cares little that the person whose place he takes has had to flee during our sleep from a band of cutthroats.

No doubt this self had maintained some contact with the old self, as a friend who is indifferent to a bereavement speaks of it nevertheless to those who come to the house, in a suitable tone of sorrow, and returns from time to time to the room in which the widower who has asked him to receive the company for him may still be heard weeping. I too still wept when I became once again for a moment the former friend of Albertine. But it was into a new personality that I was tending to pass altogether. It is not because other people are dead that our affection for them grows faint, it is because we ourselves are dying. Albertine had no cause to reproach her friend. The man who was usurping his name had merely inherited it. We can only be faithful to what we remember, we remember only what we have known. My new

self, while it grew up in the shadow of the old, had often heard the other speak of Albertine; through that other self, through the stories it gathered from it, it thought that it knew her, it found her amiable, it loved her, but this was only a love at second hand.

Another person in whom the process of oblivion, so far as concerned Albertine, was probably more rapid at this time, and enabled me in return to realize a little later a new advance that this process had made in me (and this is my memory of a second stage before the final oblivion), was Andrée. I can scarcely, indeed, refrain from citing this oblivion of Albertine as, if not the sole cause, if not even the principal cause, at any rate a conditioning and necessary cause of a conversation between Andrée and myself about six months after the conversation that I have already reported, when her words were so different from those that she had used on the former occasion. I remember that it was in my room because at that moment I found pleasure in having semicarnal relations with her, because of the collective form originally assumed and now being resumed by my love for the girls of the little band, a love that had long been undivided among them, and only for a while associated exclusively with Albertine's person during the months that had preceded and followed her death.

We were in my room for another reason as well that enables me to date this conversation quite accurately. This was that I had been banished from the rest of the apartment because it was Mamma's "at home" day. It was a day when Mamma had gone to lunch with Mme Sazerat.⁵⁶ Since it was Mamma's "at home" day, she had hesitated to go to lunch with Mme Sazerat. But since, even at Combray, Mme Sazerat always contrived to invite you to meet boring people, Mamma, certain that she would not enjoy herself, would be able without sacrificing any pleasure to return home in good time. And she had indeed returned in time and without regret, Mme Sazerat having had nobody but the most deadly people who were frozen from the start by the special voice that she adopted when she had company, what Mamma called her Wednesday voice. My mother was, nevertheless, fond of her, was sorry for her poverty—the result of the indiscretions of her father, who had been ruined by the Duchesse de X—a poverty that compelled her to live all the year round at Combray, with a few weeks at her cousin's house in Paris and a great "pleasure trip" every ten years. I remember that the day before this, at my request repeated for months past, and because the princess was always begging her to come, Mamma had

gone to call on the Princesse de Parme who, herself, paid no calls, and at whose house people as a rule contented themselves with signing their names, but who had insisted on my mother's coming to see her, since protocol prevented her from coming to us. My mother had come home thoroughly cross: "You have sent me on a fool's errand," she told me, "the Princesse de Parme barely greeted me, she turned back to the ladies to whom she was talking without paying me any attention, and after ten minutes, since she hadn't uttered a word to me, I came away without her even offering me her hand. I was extremely annoyed; however, on the doorstep, as I was leaving, I met the Duchesse de Guermantes who was very kind and spoke to me a great deal about you. What a strange idea of yours to talk to her about Albertine! She told me that you had said to her that her death had caused you such grief. (I had in fact said this to the duchess, but I didn't even remember it, and I hardly made a point of it. But the most preoccupied people often pay remarkable attention to words we let slip, words that seem quite natural to us, and which arouse their curiosity profoundly.) I will never go near the Princesse de Parme again. You have made me make a fool of myself."

Now the next day, which was my mother's "at home" day, Andrée came to see me. She did not have much time, for she had to go and call for Gisèle, with whom she was very eager to dine. "I know her faults, but she is after all my best friend and the person for whom I feel most affection," she told me. And she even appeared to be somewhat alarmed at the thought that I might ask her to let me dine with them. She was hungry for people, and a third person who knew her too well, such as myself, would, by preventing her from letting herself go, at once prevent her from completely enjoying herself in their company.

It is true that when she came, I was not there; she was waiting for me, and I was about to go through the small drawing room to join her when I realized on hearing a voice, that I had another visitor. Eager to see Andrée, who was in my room, and not knowing who the other visitor was, who evidently did not know her since that person had been led to another room, I listened for a moment at the door of the small drawing room; for my visitor was not alone, he was speaking to a woman. "*Oh, ma chérie, c'est dans mon coeur!*"⁵⁷ he crooned to her, quoting the lines by Armand Silvestre. "Yes, you will always remain my darling in spite of everything you've done to me:

*“Les morts dorment en paix dans le sein de la terre
Ainsi doivent dormir nos sentiments éteints.
Ces reliques du coeur ont aussi leur poussière;
Sur leurs restes sacrés ne portons pas les mains.”*⁵⁸

“It’s somewhat *vieux jeu*,⁵⁹ but isn’t it pretty! And also what I might have said to you on the very first day:

“Tu les feras pleurer, enfant belle et chérie . . .

“What, you don’t know it?

*“. . . Tous ces bambins, hommes futurs
Qui suspendent déjà leur jeune rêverie
Aux cils câlins de tes yeux purs.”*⁶⁰

“Ah, for a moment I thought I could say to myself:

*“Le premier soir qu’il vint ici
De fierté je n’eus plus souci.
Je lui disais: ‘Tu m’aimeras
Aussi longtemps que tu pourras.’
Je ne dormais bien qu’en ses bras.”*⁶¹

Curious to see the woman to whom this deluge of poems was addressed, even if for a moment I had to postpone my urgent meeting with Andrée, I opened the door. They were being recited by M. de Charlus to a soldier whom I at once recognized as Morel, and who was about to leave for his two-week military service.⁶² He was no longer on good terms with M. de Charlus but saw him from time to time to ask some favor of him. M. de Charlus who usually gave a more masculine style to his expressions of love, also had his languid moments. Moreover, during his childhood, in order to be able to feel and understand the verses of the poets, he had been obliged to suppose their being addressed not to an unfaithful beauty but to a young man. I left them as soon as I could, although I felt that paying visits with Morel was an immense satisfaction to M. de Charlus, to whom it gave for a moment the illusion of being remarried. And besides, he combined in his person the snobbery of queens with that of servants.

The memory of Albertine had become so fragmentary in me that it no longer caused me any sadness and was no more now than a transition to new desires, like a chord that announces a change of key. And indeed, any idea of a momentary sensual caprice being ruled out, insofar as I was still faithful to Albertine’s memory, I was happier at having Andrée in my company than I would have been at having Albertine miraculously restored

to life. For Andrée could tell me more things about Albertine than Albertine herself had ever told me. Now the problems concerning Albertine still remained in my mind although my affection for her, both physical and mental, had already vanished. And my desire to know about her life, because it had diminished less, was now relatively greater than my need of her presence. On the other hand, the thought that a woman had perhaps had relations with Albertine no longer provoked in me anything except the desire to have relations with that woman myself. I told Andrée this, caressing her as I spoke. Then, without making the slightest effort to make her words consistent with what she had said a few months earlier, Andrée said to me half-smiling: “Ah! yes, but you are a man. And so we can’t do quite the same things as I used to do with Albertine.” And whether because she thought that this increased my desire (in the hope of extracting confidences, I had told her that I would like to have relations with a woman who had had them with Albertine) or my grief, or perhaps destroyed a sense of superiority to herself that she might suppose me to feel at being the only person who had had relations with Albertine: “Ah! We spent many happy hours together, she was so caressing, so passionate. Besides, it was not only with me that she liked to enjoy herself. She had met a handsome young man at Mme Verdurin’s, named Morel. They understood each other at once. He undertook—having her permission to enjoy them himself, for he liked little novices, and as soon as he had set them on the path of evil, he would abandon them—and thus he undertook to entice young fishergirls from some remote beach, young laundresses, who would fall for a boy, but would not have responded to a girl’s advances. As soon as the girl was well under his control, he would bring her to a safe place, where he handed her over to Albertine. For fear of losing Morel, who took part in it all too, the girl always obeyed, and yet she lost him all the same, for, as he was afraid of the consequences and also as once or twice was enough for him, he would slip away leaving a false address. Once he had the audacity to bring one of these girls, with Albertine, to a brothel at Couliville, where four or five of the women had her together, or in turn. That was his passion, and Albertine’s also. But Albertine suffered terrible remorse afterward. I believe that when she was with you she had conquered her passion and put off indulging it from day to day. And her affection for you was so great that she had scruples. But it was quite certain that if she ever left you she would begin again. She hoped that you would rescue her, that you would marry her. She

felt in her heart that her passion was a sort of criminal lunacy, and I have often asked myself whether it was not after an incident of that sort, which had led to a suicide in a family, that she killed herself on purpose. I must confess that in the early days of her life with you she had not entirely given up her games with me. There were days when she seemed to need it, so much so that once, when it would have been so easy elsewhere, she could not say goodbye without taking me to bed with her, in your house. We had no luck, we were very nearly caught. She had taken advantage of the fact that Françoise had gone out on some errand, and you had not yet come home. Then she had turned out all the lights so that when you let yourself in with your key it would take you some time to find the switch, and she had left the door of her room open. We heard you come upstairs, I had just time to make myself tidy and come down. Which was quite unnecessary, for by an incredible chance you had left your key at home and had to ring the bell. But we lost our heads all the same, so that to conceal our embarrassment both of us, without time to consult each other, had the same idea: to pretend to be afraid of the scent of syringa, which as a matter of fact we adored. You were bringing a long branch of it home with you, which enabled me to turn my head away and hide my confusion. This did not prevent me from telling you in the most idiotic way that perhaps Françoise had come back and would let you in, when a moment earlier I had told you the lie that we had only just come in from our drive and that when we arrived Françoise had not left the house yet (which was true). But our mistake was—supposing you to have your key—turning out the light, for we were afraid that as you came upstairs you would see it turned on again, or at least we hesitated too long. And for three nights on end Albertine couldn't close her eyes because she was constantly afraid that you might be suspicious and ask Françoise why she had not turned on the light before leaving the house. For Albertine was terribly afraid of you, and at times she would assure me that you were deceitful, mean, that you hated her really. After three days she gathered from your calm that you had not said anything to Françoise, and she was able to sleep again. But she never resumed her relations with me after that, perhaps from fear, perhaps from remorse, for she made out that she did really love you, or perhaps she was in love with some other man. In any case, nobody could ever mention syringa again in her hearing without her turning crimson and putting her hand over her face in the hope of hiding her blushes.”

Like certain strokes of good fortune, there are strokes of misfortunes that come too late, they do not assume the magnitude that they would have had in our eyes a little earlier. One such was the misfortune that Andrée's terrible revelation was to me. No doubt, even when bad news ought to make us unhappy, it so happens that in the diversion, the balanced give and take of conversation, they pass in front of us without stopping, and that we ourselves, preoccupied with a thousand things that we have to say in response, transformed, by the desire to please our present company, into someone else protected for a few moments in this new cycle against the affections, the sufferings that we have discarded upon entering it and will find again when the brief spell is broken, we do not have the time to take them in. And yet, if these affections, these sufferings are too predominant, we enter only distractedly into the zone of a new and momentary world, in which, too faithful to our sufferings, we are incapable of becoming another person, and then the words that we hear said enter at once into relation with our heart, which has not remained on the sideline. But for some time past words that concerned Albertine, had, like a poison that has evaporated, lost their toxic power. She was already too remote from me; as a wayfarer seeing in the afternoon a misty crescent in the sky, says to himself: "So that's the vast moon," so I said to myself: "What, so that truth that I have sought so earnestly, that I have so dreaded, is nothing more than these few words uttered in the course of conversation, words to which we cannot even give our whole attention since we are not alone!" Besides, it took me at a serious disadvantage, I had exhausted myself with Andrée. Really, with a truth of such magnitude, I would have liked to have more strength to devote to it; it remained outside me, but this was because I had not yet found a place for it in my heart. We would like the truth to be revealed to us by novel signs, not by a phrase similar to those that we have constantly repeated to ourselves. The habit of thinking prevents us at times from experiencing reality, makes us immune to it, makes it seem no more than another thought. There is no idea that does not carry in itself its possible refutation, no word that does not imply its opposite.

In any case, if all this was true, it was now a useless verification of the life of a mistress who no longer exists, and that rises up from the depths and appears just when we are no longer able to make any use of it. Then, thinking doubtless of some other woman whom we now love and with regard to whom the same thing may occur (for to her whom we have

forgotten we no longer give a thought), we lose heart. We say to ourselves: "If she were alive!" We say to ourselves: "If she who is alive could understand all this and that when she is dead, I will know everything that she is hiding from me!" But it is a vicious circle. If I could have brought Albertine back to life, the immediate consequence would have been that Andrée would have revealed nothing. It is almost the same thing as the everlasting: "You'll see when I no longer love you" which is so true and so absurd, since we would indeed elicit much if we were no longer in love, but we would no longer care about eliciting it. It is precisely the same thing. For the woman whom we see again when we are no longer in love with her, if she tells us everything, the fact is that she is no longer herself, or that we are no longer ourselves: the person who was in love has ceased to exist. There also death has passed by and has made everything easy and pointless. I pursued these reflections, adopting the hypothesis that Andrée was truthful—which was possible—and had been prompted to sincerity with me, precisely because she now had relations with me, from that Saint-André-des-Champs side of her nature that Albertine had shown me at the start. She was helped in this case by the fact that she was no longer afraid of Albertine, for the reality of other people survives their death for only a short time in our mind, and after a few years they are like those gods of obsolete religions whom we offend without fear, because we have ceased to believe in their existence. But the fact that Andrée no longer believed in the reality of Albertine might mean that she no longer feared (any more than to betray a secret that she had promised not to reveal) to invent a falsehood that slandered retrospectively her alleged accomplice. Had this absence of fear permitted her to reveal the truth at last in telling me those things, or rather to invent a falsehood, if, for some reason, she supposed me to be full of happiness and pride and wished to cause me pain? Perhaps she was irritated with me (an irritation suspended so long as she saw that I was miserable, inconsolable) because I had had relations with Albertine and she envied me, perhaps—supposing that I considered myself on that account more highly favored than her—an advantage that she herself had never, perhaps, obtained, nor even sought. Thus it was that I had often heard her say how ill they were looking to people whose air of radiant health, and what was more their awareness of their radiant health, exasperated her, and say in the hope of annoying them that she herself was very well, a fact that she did not cease to proclaim when she was seriously ill until the day when, in the

detachment of death, it no longer mattered to her that other fortunate people should be well and should know that she herself was dying. But this day was still remote. Perhaps she had turned against me, for what reason I knew not, in one of those rages in which she used, long ago, to turn against the young man so learned in sporting matters,⁶³ so ignorant of everything else, whom we had met at Balbec, who since then had been living with Rachel, and at the mention of whom Andrée overflowed in defamatory remarks, hoping to be sued for libel in order to be able to launch against his father disgraceful accusations the falsehood of which he would not be able to prove. Quite possibly this rage against myself had simply revived, having doubtless ceased when she saw how miserable I was. Indeed, the very same people whom she, her eyes flashing with rage, had longed to disgrace, to kill, to send to prison, by false testimony if need be, she had only to know that they were unhappy, humiliated, for her to cease to wish them any harm, and to be ready to overwhelm them with kindnesses. For she was not fundamentally wicked, and if her unapparent, somewhat deeper nature was not the kindness that one divined at first from her delicate attentions, but rather envy and pride, her third nature, deeper still, the true but not entirely realized nature, tended toward goodness and the love of her neighbor. Only, like all those people who, being in a certain state desire a better one, but knowing it only by desire, do not realize that the first condition is to break away from the former state—like the neurasthenics or morphinomaniacs who are anxious to be cured, but at the same time do not wish to be deprived of their manias or their morphine, like the religious hearts or artistic spirits attached to the world who long for solitude but seek nevertheless to imagine it as not implying an absolute renunciation of their former existence—Andrée was prepared to love all her fellow creatures, but on the condition that she should first of all have succeeded in not imagining them as triumphant, and to that end should have humiliated them in advance. She did not understand that we ought to love even the proud, and to conquer their pride by love and not by a more overweening pride. But the fact is that she was like those invalids who wish to be cured by the very means that prolong their malady, which they like and would cease at once to like if they renounced them. But people want to learn to swim and at the same time to keep one foot on the ground.

As for the young sportsman, the Verdurins' nephew,⁶⁴ whom I had met during my two visits to Balbec, I am bound to add, incidentally and

prematurely, that sometime after Andrée's visit, the account of which will be resumed in a moment, certain events occurred that caused a great sensation. First of all, this young man (perhaps remembering Albertine with whom I did not then know that he had been in love) became engaged to Andrée and married her, in spite of Rachel's despair to which he paid not the slightest attention. Andrée no longer said then (that is to say some months after the visit of which I have been speaking) that he was a wretch, and I realized later on that she had said so only because she was madly in love with him and thought that he did not want to have anything to do with her. But another fact impressed me even more. This young man produced certain sketches for the theater, with settings and costumes designed by himself, which have effected in the art of today a revolution at least equal to that brought about by the Ballets Russes. In fact, the best-qualified critics regarded his work as something of capital importance, almost as works of genius and for that matter I agree with them, confirming thus, to my own astonishment, the opinion long held by Rachel. The people who had known him at Balbec, paying close attention only to whether the cut of the clothes of the men with whom he associated was or was not elegant, who had seen him spend all his time at baccarat, at the races, on the golf course, or on the polo ground, who knew that at school he had always been a dunce, and had even been expelled from the lycée (to annoy his parents, he had spent two months in the smart brothel in which M. de Charlus had hoped to surprise Morel), thought that perhaps his works were done by Andrée who, in her love for him, chose to allow him the glory, or that more probably he was paying, out of his huge personal fortune at which his excesses had barely nibbled, some inspired but needy professional to create them (this kind of wealthy society, unpolished by mingling with the aristocracy, and having no idea of what constitutes an artist—who is to them either an actor whom they engage to recite monologues at their daughter's engagement party, handing him straightaway his fee discreetly in another room, or a painter to whom they make her sit after she is married, before the children come and when she is still at her best—are apt to believe that all the society people who write, compose, or paint have their work done for them and pay to obtain a reputation as a creative artist as other men pay to secure a seat in Parliament). But all this was untrue, and the young man was indeed the author of those admirable works. When I learned this, I was obliged to hesitate between different suppositions. Either he had indeed been for years

on end the “coarse brute” that he appeared to be, and some physiological cataclysm had awakened in him the dormant genius, like a Sleeping Beauty, or else at the period of his tempestuous schooldays, of his failures to matriculate in the final examination, of his heavy gambling losses at Balbec, of his reluctance to show himself in the “crawler” with his Aunt Verdurin’s faithful, because of their ugly attire, he was already a man of genius, distracted perhaps from his genius, having left its key beneath the doormat in the effervescence of juvenile passions; or again, already a conscious man of genius, and at the bottom of his classes, because, while the professor was uttering platitudes about Cicero,⁶⁵ he himself was reading Rimbaud⁶⁶ or Goethe.⁶⁷ Certainly, there was no ground for any such hypothesis when I met him at Balbec, where his interests seemed to me to be centered solely in turning out a smart carriage and pair and mixing cocktails. But even this is not an irrefutable objection. He might be extremely vain, and this may be allied to genius, and might seek to shine in the manner that he knew to be dazzling in the world in which he lived, which did not mean showing a profound knowledge of *Elective Affinities*,⁶⁸ but far rather a knowledge of how to drive a four-in-hand.⁶⁹ Moreover, I am not at all sure that later on, when he had become the author of those fine and original works, he would have cared greatly, outside the theaters in which he was known, to greet anyone who was not in evening dress, like the “faithful” in their earlier manner, which would be a proof in him not of stupidity but of vanity, and indeed of a certain practical sense, a certain clairvoyance in adapting his vanity to the mentality of the imbeciles upon whose esteem he depended and in whose eyes a dinner jacket might perhaps shine with a more brilliant radiance than the eyes of a thinker. Who can say whether, seen from without, some man of talent, or even a man devoid of talent but a lover of the things of the mind, myself for instance, would not have appeared, to anyone who met him at Rivebelle, at the hotel at Balbec, or on the esplanade, the most perfect and pretentious imbecile? Not to mention that for Octave matters of art must have been something so intimate, inhabiting the most secret places of his heart that doubtless it would never have occurred to him to speak of them, as Saint-Loup, for example, would have spoken, for whom the fine arts had the prestige that horses and carriages had for Octave. And moreover he may have had a passion for gambling, and it is said that he has retained it. All the same,

even if the piety that brought to light the unknown work of Vinteuil arose from amid the murky environment of Montjouvain, I was no less impressed by the thought that the masterpieces that are perhaps the most extraordinary of our day have emerged not from the *concours général*,⁷⁰ from a model, academic education, à la Broglie,⁷¹ but from the frequentation of “paddocks” and fashionable bars. In any case, in those days at Balbec, the reasons that made me anxious to know him, that made Albertine and her friends anxious that I should not know him, were equally extraneous to his merit, and could only have brought to light the eternal misunderstanding between an “intellectual” (represented in this instance by myself) and people in society (represented by the little band) with regard to a social butterfly (the young golfer). I had no inkling of his talent, and his prestige in my eyes, like that, long ago, of Mme Blatin,⁷² had been that of his being—whatever they might say—the friend of my girlfriends, and more one of their band than myself. On the other hand, Albertine and Andrée, symbolizing in this respect the incapacity of people in society to bring a sound judgment to bear upon the things of the mind and their propensity to attach themselves in that connection to false appearances, not only thought me almost idiotic because I took an interest in such an imbecile, but were astonished above all that, golfer for golfer, my choice should have fallen upon the poorest player of them all. If, for example, I had chosen to associate with young Gilbert de Belloeuvre, apart from golf he was a boy who had the gift of conversation, who had secured an honorable mention in the *concours général* and was an agreeable versifier (as a matter of fact he was the stupidest of them all). Or again, if my object had been to “make a study for a book,” Guy Saumoy, who was completely insane, who had abducted two girls, was at least a singular type who might “interest” me. These two might have been allowed me, but the other, what attraction could I find in him? He was a perfect example of the “great brute,” of the “coarse brute.”

To return to Andrée’s visit, after the disclosure that she had just made to me of her relations with Albertine, she added that the main reason for which Albertine had left me was because of what her friends of the little band might think, and other people as well, when they saw her living like that with a young man to whom she was not married. “Of course, I know it was in your mother’s house. But that makes no difference. You can’t imagine

what all those girls are like, what they conceal from one another, how they dread one another's opinion. I have seen them being terribly severe with young men simply because the men knew their friends and they were afraid that certain things might be repeated, and then I have happened by chance to see those very same girls in a totally different light, much to their chagrin." A few months earlier, this knowledge that Andrée appeared to possess of the motives that swayed the girls of the little band would have seemed to me the most priceless thing in the world. What she said was perhaps sufficient to explain why Albertine, who had given herself to me afterward in Paris, had refused to yield to me at Balbec, where I was constantly meeting her friends, which I had absurdly supposed to be so great an advantage in winning her affection. Perhaps indeed it was because she had seen me display signs of my confiding in Andrée or because I had rashly told the latter that Albertine was coming to spend the night at the Grand Hôtel, that Albertine who perhaps, an hour earlier, was ready to let me take certain favors, as though that were the simplest thing in the world, had abruptly changed her mind and threatened to ring the bell.⁷³ But then, she must have been accommodating to lots of others. This thought rekindled my jealousy and I told Andrée that there was something that I wanted to ask her. "You did those things in your grandmother's empty apartment?" "Oh, no, never, we would have been disturbed." "Why, I thought . . . it seemed to me . . ." "Besides, Albertine especially loved doing it in the country." "And where was that?" "Originally, when she didn't have time to go very far, we used to go to the Buttes-Chaumont. She knew a house there. Or else we would lie under the trees, there is never anyone about; in the grotto of the Petit Trianon, too." "There, you see; how am I to believe you? You swore to me, not a year ago, that you had never done anything at the Buttes-Chaumont." "I was afraid of hurting you." As I have said, I thought (although not until much later) that on the contrary it was on this second occasion, the day of her confessions, that Andrée had sought to hurt me. And this thought would have occurred to me at once, while she was speaking, because I would have felt the need of it, if I had still been as much in love with Albertine. But Andrée's words did not hurt me sufficiently to make it indispensable to me to dismiss them immediately as untrue. In short, if what Andrée said was true, and I did not doubt it at the time, the real Albertine whom I discovered, after having known so many diverse forms of Albertine, differed very little from the young bacchante

who had sprung up and whom I had detected, on the first day, on the esplanade at Balbec, and who had offered me so many different aspects in succession, as a town gradually alters the position of its buildings one after the other as we approach it so as to crush, to obliterate the principal monument that alone we see from a distance, until finally when we know it well and can judge it exactly, its true proportions prove to be those that the perspective of the first glance had indicated, the rest, through which we passed, being no more than that successive series of lines of defense that every being raises against our vision and that we must cross one after another, at the cost of how much suffering, before we arrive at the heart. If, however, I had no need to believe absolutely in Albertine's innocence because my suffering had diminished, I can say that conversely if I did not suffer unduly at this revelation, it was because, some time since, for the belief that I fabricated for myself in Albertine's innocence, had been substituted gradually and without my realizing it the belief, ever present in my mind, in her guilt. Now if I no longer believed in Albertine's innocence, it was because I had already ceased to feel the need, the passionate desire to believe in it. It is desire that engenders belief and if we are not usually aware of this, it is because most of the desires that create beliefs end—unlike the desire that had persuaded me that Albertine was innocent—only with our own life. To all the evidence that corroborated my original version, I had stupidly preferred simple statements by Albertine. Why had I believed them? Lying is essential to humanity. It plays as large a part perhaps as the quest for pleasure and is moreover commanded by that quest. We lie in order to protect our pleasure or our honor if the disclosure of our pleasure runs counter to our honor. We lie all our life long, especially indeed, perhaps only, to those people who love us. In fact, they alone make us fear for our pleasure and desire their esteem. I had at first thought Albertine guilty, and it was only my desire, by using the strength of my intelligence to create doubts, that had set me on the wrong track. Perhaps we live surrounded by electric, seismic signs, which we must interpret in good faith in order to know the truth about the characters of other people. If the truth must be told, saddened as I was in spite of everything by Andrée's words, I felt it to be better that the truth should at last accord with what my instinct had originally foreboded, rather than with the wretched optimism to which I had later made a cowardly surrender. I preferred that life should remain at the same level as my intuitions. Those moreover that I had felt, that first

day on the beach, when I had supposed that those girls embodied the frenzy of pleasure, were vice incarnate, and again on the evening when I had seen Albertine's governess leading that passionate girl home to the little villa, as one thrusts into its cage a wild animal that nothing in the future, despite appearances, will ever succeed in taming, did not those intuitions accord with what Bloch had told me when he had made the world seem so beautiful to me by showing me, making me quiver on all my walks, at every encounter, the universality of desire?⁷⁴ Perhaps, when all was said, it was better that I should not have found those first intuitions verified anew until now. While the whole of my love for Albertine endured, they would have made me suffer too keenly and it was better that there should have subsisted of them only a trace, my perpetual suspicion of things that I did not see and that nevertheless happened continually so close to me, and perhaps another trace as well, earlier, more vast, which was *my love itself*. Was it not indeed, despite all the denials of my reason, tantamount to knowing Albertine in all her hideousness, merely to choose her, to love her? And even in the moments when suspicion is lulled, is not love the persistence and a transformation of that suspicion, is it not a proof of clairvoyance (a proof unintelligible to the lover himself), since desire going always in the direction of what is most opposite to ourselves forces us to love what will make us suffer? Certainly there enter into a person's charm, into the attraction of her eyes, her lips, her figure, the elements unknown to us that are capable of making us unhappy, so much so that to feel ourselves attracted by the person, to begin to love her, is, however innocent we may pretend it to be, to read already, in a different version, all her betrayals and her faults.

And those charms that, to attract me, materialized thus the noxious, dangerous, fatal elements of a person, did they not have a more direct relation of cause to effect to those secret poisons than do the seductive luxuriance and the toxic juice of certain venomous flowers? It was perhaps, I told myself, Albertine's vice itself, the cause of my future sufferings, that had produced in her that honest, frank manner, creating the illusion that one could enjoy with her the same loyal and unrestricted comradeship as with a man, just as a parallel vice had produced in M. de Charlus a feminine refinement of sensibility and mind. In the midst of the most complete blindness, perspicacity subsists in the form of predilection and tenderness, so that we are wrong in speaking of a bad choice in love, since as soon as

there is a choice it can only be bad. "Did those excursions to the Buttes-Chaumont take place when you used to call for her here?" I asked Andrée. "Oh! no, from the day when Albertine came back from Balbec with you, except the time I told you about, she never did anything again with me. She would not even allow me to mention such things to her." "But, my dear Andrée, why go on lying to me? By the merest chance, for I never try to find out anything, I have learned in the minutest details things of that sort that Albertine did, I can tell you exactly, on the bank of the river with a laundry girl, only a few days before her death." "Ah! perhaps after she had left you, that I can't say. She felt that she had failed, that she would never again be able to regain your trust." These last words shook me. Then I thought again of the evening of the branch of syringa, I remembered that about two weeks later, as my jealousy kept changing its object, I had asked Albertine whether she had ever had relations with Andrée, and she had replied: "Oh! never! Of course, I adore Andrée; I have a deep affection for her, but as though we were sisters, and even if I had the tastes that you seem to suppose, she is the last person that I would have thought of for that. I can swear to you by anything you like, by my aunt, by my poor mother's grave." I had believed her. And yet even if I had not been made suspicious by the contradiction between her former partial admissions with regard to certain matters and the firmness with which she had afterward denied them as soon as she saw that I was not indifferent to them, I ought to have remembered Swann, convinced of the platonic nature of M. de Charlus's friendships and assuring me of it on the evening of the very day on which I had seen the tailor and the baron in the courtyard;⁷⁵ I ought to have reflected that there are, one behind the other, two worlds, one consisting of the things that the best, the sincerest people say, and behind it the world composed of those same people's successive actions, so that when a married woman says to you of a young man: "Oh! It is perfectly true that I have an immense affection for him, but it is something quite innocent, quite pure, I could swear it upon the memory of my parents," we ought ourselves, instead of feeling any hesitation, to swear that she has probably just come from her bathroom into which, after every assignation that she has with the young man in question, she dashes, to prevent any risk of his giving her a child. The spray of syringa made me profoundly sad, as did also the idea that Albertine could have thought or called me deceitful and hostile; most of all perhaps, certain lies so unexpected that I had difficulty in grasping

them. One day Albertine had told me that she had been to an airfield, that the aviator was in love with her (this doubtless in order to divert my suspicion from women, thinking that I was less jealous of other men), that it had been amusing to see how dazzled Andrée was by the said aviator, by all the compliments that he paid Albertine, until finally Andrée had longed to go up in an airplane with him. Now this was an entire fabrication; Andrée had never visited the airfield in question, etc.

When Andrée left me, it was dinnertime. “You will never guess who has been to see me and stayed at least three hours,” said my mother. “I call it three hours, it was perhaps longer, she arrived almost on the heels of my first visitor, who was Mme Cottard, sat still and watched everybody come and go—and I had more than thirty callers—and left me only a quarter of an hour ago. If you hadn’t had your friend Andrée with you, I would have sent for you.” “Why, who was it?” “A person who never pays calls.” “The Princesse de Parme?” “Why, I have a cleverer son than I thought I had. There is no fun in making you guess a name, for you hit on it at once.” “Did she come to apologize for her coldness yesterday?” “No, that would have been stupid, her visit itself was an apology. Your poor grandmother would have thought it admirable. It seems that about two o’clock she had sent a footman to ask whether I had an at-home day. She was told that this was the day and so up she came.” My first thought, which I did not dare mention to Mamma, was that the Princesse de Parme, surrounded the day before by people of rank and fashion with whom she was on intimate terms and enjoyed conversing, had when she saw my mother come into the room felt an annoyance that she had made no attempt to conceal. And it was quite in the style of the great ladies of Germany, which for that matter the Guermantes had largely adopted, this haughtiness, for which they thought to atone by a scrupulous affability. But my mother believed, and I came in time to share her opinion, that all that had happened was that the Princesse de Parme, having failed to recognize her, had not felt herself bound to pay her any attention, that she had learned after my mother’s departure who she was, either from the Duchesse de Guermantes, whom my mother had met as she was leaving the house, or from the list of her visitors, whose names, before they entered her presence, the ushers asked and inscribed in a register. She had thought it impolite to send word or to say to my mother: “I did not recognize you,” but—and this was no less in harmony with the good manners of the German courts and with the Guermantes’ code of behavior

than my original theory—had thought that a visit, an exceptional action on the part of a royal personage, and what was more a visit of several hours' duration, would convey the explanation to my mother in an indirect but no less convincing form, which is just what did happen. But I did not stay to ask my mother to tell me about the princess's call, for I had just recalled a number of incidents with regard to Albertine about which I had meant but had forgotten to question Andrée. How little, for that matter, did I know, would I ever know, of this story of Albertine, the only story that could be of particular interest to me, or was at least beginning to interest me again at certain moments. For man is that creature without any fixed age, who has the faculty of becoming, in a few seconds, many years younger, and who, surrounded by the walls of the time through which he has lived, floats within them but as though in a basin the surface-level of which is constantly changing, so as to bring him into the range now of one epoch, now of another. I wrote to Andrée asking her to come again. She was unable to do so until a week later. Almost as soon as she entered the room, I said to her: "Very well, then, since you maintain that Albertine never did that sort of thing while she was staying here, according to you, it was to be able to do it more freely that she left me, but for which of her friends?" "Certainly not, it was not that at all." "Then because I was too disagreeable?" "No, I don't think so. I believe that she was forced to leave you by her aunt, who had designs for her future upon that guttersnipe, you know, the young man whom you used to call 'I'm in a pickle,' the young man who was in love with Albertine and had asked for her hand. Seeing that you were not marrying her, they were afraid that the shocking length of her stay in your house might prevent the young man from doing so. Mme Bontemps, on whom the young man had brought continual pressure to bear, summoned Albertine home. Albertine after all needed her uncle and aunt, and when she found that they expected her to make up her mind she left you." I had never in my jealousy thought of this explanation, but only of Albertine's desire for other women and of my own surveillance of her; I had forgotten that there was also Mme Bontemps who might presently regard as strange what had shocked my mother from the first. At least Mme Bontemps was afraid that it might shock this possible husband whom she was keeping in reserve for Albertine, in case I failed to marry her. And so Albertine, contrary to what Andrée's mother used to think, had had after all the prospect of a wealthy marriage. And when she had wanted to visit Mme Verdurin, when she had

spoken to her in secret, when she had been so annoyed that I should have gone there that evening without warning her, the intrigue between her and Mme Verdurin had had as its object her meeting not Mlle Vinteuil but the nephew who loved Albertine and for whom Mme Verdurin, with that satisfaction at the prospect of certain marriages that surprise us in some families into whose state of mind we do not enter completely, did not desire a rich bride. Now I had never given another thought to this nephew who had perhaps been the initiator thanks to whom I had received her first kiss. And for the whole structure of Albertine's anxieties that I had built up, I must now substitute another, or rather superimpose it, for perhaps it did not exclude the other, a preference for women did not prevent her from marrying. Was this marriage really the cause of Albertine's departure, and out of self-respect, so as not to appear to be dependent on her aunt, or to force me to marry her, had she preferred not to mention it? I was beginning to realize that the system of multiple causes for a single action, of which Albertine showed her mastery in her relations with her girlfriends when she allowed each of them to suppose that it was for her sake that she had come, was only a sort of artificial, deliberate symbol of the different aspects that an action assumes according to the point of view that we adopt. It was not the first time I had felt astonishment and a sort of shame at never once having told myself that Albertine was in a false position in my house, a position that might give offense to her aunt; it was not the first, nor was it the last. How often has it happened to me, after having sought to understand the relations between two people and the crises that they bring about, to hear, all of a sudden, a third person speak to me of them from his own point of view, for he has even closer relations with one of the two, a point of view that has perhaps been the cause of the crisis! And if people's actions remain so indefinite, how should not the people themselves be equally indefinite? Listening to the people who maintained that Albertine was a schemer who had tried to get one man after another to marry her, it was not difficult to imagine how they would have defined her life with me. And yet to my mind she had been a victim, a victim who perhaps was not altogether pure, but in that case guilty for other reasons, on account of vices to which people did not refer.

But we must above all say to ourselves this: on the one hand, lying is often a trait of character; on the other hand, in women who would not otherwise be liars, it is a natural defense, improvised at first, then more and

more organized, against the sudden danger that would be capable of destroying all life: love. Furthermore, it is not by chance if men who are intelligent and sensitive invariably give themselves to insensitive and inferior women, and are at the same time so attached to them that the proof that they are not loved does not in the least cure them of the instinct to sacrifice everything else in the attempt to keep such a woman with them. If I say that such men need to suffer, I am saying something that is accurate while suppressing the preliminary truths that make that need—involuntary in a sense—to suffer a perfectly comprehensible consequence of those truths. Without taking into account that complete natures being rare, a man who is highly sensitive and highly intellectual will generally have little will power, will be the plaything of habit and of that fear of suffering in the immediate present that condemns us to perpetual suffering—and that in those conditions he will never be prepared to repudiate the woman who does not love him. We may be surprised that he should be content with so little love, but we ought rather to picture to ourselves the suffering that may be caused him by the love that he himself feels. A suffering that we ought not to pity unduly, for those terrible commotions that are caused by an unrequited love, by the departure, the death of a mistress, are like those attacks of paralysis that at first leave us helpless, but after which our muscles begin little by little to recover their vital elasticity and energy. What is more, this suffering does not lack compensation. These sensitive and intelligent men are as a rule little inclined to falsehood. This takes them all the more by surprise inasmuch as, intelligent as they may be, they live in the world of possibilities, react little, live in the suffering that a woman has just inflicted on them, rather than in the clear perception of what she wanted, what she was doing, of the man with whom she was in love, a perception granted chiefly to self-willed natures that need it in order to prepare against the future instead of lamenting the past. And so these men feel that they are betrayed without quite knowing how. Wherefore the mediocre woman with whom we were surprised to see them fall in love enriches the universe for them far more than an intelligent woman would have done. Behind each of her words, they feel that a lie is lurking, behind each house to which she says that she has gone, another house, behind each action, each person, another action, another person. Doubtless they do not know what or whom, do not have the energy, would not perhaps find it possible to discover. A lying woman, by an extremely simple trick, can

beguile, without taking the trouble to change her method, any number of people, and, what is more, the very person who ought to have discovered the trick. All this confronts the sensitive intellectual with a universe all in depths that his jealousy longs to plumb and that are not without interest to his intelligence.

Although I was not exactly a man of that category, I was going perhaps, now that Albertine was dead, to learn the secret of her life. Here again, do not these indiscretions that occur only after a person's life on earth is ended prove that nobody believes, really, in a future life? If these indiscretions are true, we ought to fear the resentment of her whose actions we are revealing fully as much on the day when we will meet her in heaven as we feared it so long as she was alive, when we felt ourselves bound to keep her secret. And if these indiscretions are false, invented because she is no longer present to contradict them, we ought to be even more afraid of the dead woman's wrath if we believed in heaven. But no one does believe in it. So that it was possible that a long debate had gone on in Albertine's heart between staying with me and leaving me, but that her decision to leave me had been made on account of her aunt, or of that young man, and not on account of women to whom perhaps she had never given a thought. The most serious thing to my mind was that Andrée, although she had nothing now to conceal from me as to Albertine's morals, swore to me that nothing of the sort had ever occurred between Albertine on the one hand and Mlle Vinteuil or her friend on the other. (Albertine herself was unconscious of her own tastes when she first met the girls, and they, from that fear of making a mistake in the object of our desire, which breeds as many errors as desire itself, regarded her as extremely hostile to that sort of thing. Perhaps later on they had learned that her tastes were similar to their own, but by that time they knew Albertine too well and Albertine knew them too well for there to be any thought of their doing things together.) In short, I did not understand any better than before why Albertine had left me. If the face of a woman can with difficulty be grasped by our eyes that cannot take in the whole of its mobile surface, by our lips, still less by our memory, if it is shrouded in obscurity according to her social position, according to the level at which we are situated, how much thicker is the veil drawn between the actions of her whom we see and her motives! Motives are situated at a deeper level, which we do not perceive, and engender moreover actions other than those that we know and often in absolute contradiction to them. When has there not been some man

in public life, regarded as a saint by his friends, who is discovered to have forged documents, robbed the state, betrayed his country? How often is a grand seigneur robbed by a steward, whom he has brought up from childhood, ready to swear that he was an honest man, as possibly he was! Now this curtain that screens another person's motives, how much more impenetrable does it become if we are in love with that person, for it clouds our judgment and also obscures the actions of her who, feeling that she is loved, ceases at once to attach any value to what would otherwise have seemed to her important, such as wealth, for example. Perhaps also she is impelled to pretend, to a certain extent, this scorn of wealth in the hope of obtaining more money by making us suffer. The bargaining instinct also may be involved in everything else; and so with the actual incidents in her life, an intrigue that she has confided to no one for fear of its being revealed to us, which many people might, for all that, have discovered, if they had felt the same passionate desire to know it as ourselves, while preserving freer minds, arousing fewer suspicions in the guilty party, an intrigue of which certain people have not been unaware—but people whom we do not know and would not know how to find. And among all these reasons for her adopting an inexplicable attitude toward us, we must include those idiosyncrasies of character that impel a person, whether from indifference to his own interests, or from hatred, or from love of freedom, or from sudden bursts of anger, or from fear of what certain people will think, to do the opposite of what we expected. And then there are the differences of environment, of upbringing, in which we refuse to believe because, when we are talking together, they are effaced by our words, but which return, when we are apart, to direct the actions of each of us from so opposite a point of view that there is no possibility of a true understanding.

“But, my dear Andrée, you are lying again. Remember—you admitted it to me yourself—when I telephoned you the evening before,⁷⁶ don't you remember?—that Albertine had been so anxious and kept it from me as though it had been something that I must not know about, to go to the afternoon party at the Verdurins' at which Mlle Vinteuil was expected.” “Yes, but Albertine had not the slightest idea that Mlle Vinteuil was to be there.” “What? You yourself told me that she had met Mme Verdurin a few days earlier. Besides, Andrée, there is no point in our trying to deceive one another. I found a note one morning in Albertine's room, a note from Mme Verdurin urging her to come that afternoon.” And I showed her the note

which, as a matter of fact, Françoise had taken care to bring to my notice by placing it on top of Albertine's possessions a few days before her departure, and, I am afraid, leaving it there to make Albertine suppose that I had been rummaging among her things, to let her know in any case that I had seen it. And I had often asked myself whether Françoise's ruse had not been largely responsible for the departure of Albertine, who saw that she could no longer conceal anything from me, and felt disheartened, defeated. I showed Andrée the note: "I feel no compunction, everything is excused by this strong family feeling . . ." "You know very well, Andrée, that Albertine used always to say that Mlle Vinteuil's friend was indeed a mother, an elder sister to her." "But you have misinterpreted this note. The person that Mme Verdurin wanted Albertine to meet that afternoon was not at all Mlle Vinteuil's friend, it was the young man you call 'I'm in a pickle,' and the strong family feeling is what Mme Verdurin felt for the brute who is after all her nephew. However, I think that Albertine did hear afterward that Mlle Vinteuil was to be there, Mme Verdurin may have let her know incidentally. Of course, the thought of seeing her friend again gave her pleasure, reminded her of happy times in the past, but just as you would be glad, if you were going to some place, to know that Elstir would be there, but no more than that, not even as much. No, if Albertine was unwilling to say why she wanted to go to Mme Verdurin's, it is because it was a rehearsal to which Mme Verdurin had invited a very small party, including that nephew of hers whom you had met at Balbec, to whom Mme Bontemps was hoping to marry Albertine and to whom Albertine wanted to talk. He's a real scoundrel. And anyhow there is no need to seek out all these explanations," Andrée went on. "Heaven only knows how I loved Albertine and what a really nice person she was, but really, after she had typhoid (a year before you first met us all) she was an absolute madcap. All of a sudden she would be sick of what she was doing, all her plans would have to be changed at once, and she herself probably could not tell you why. You remember the year when you first came to Balbec, the year when you met us all? One fine day she had someone send her a telegram calling her back to Paris, she had barely time to pack her trunks. But there was absolutely no reason for her to go. All the pretexts that she gave were false. Paris was deadly boring for her at the moment. We were all of us still at Balbec. The golf club wasn't closed, indeed the heats for the cup that she was so keen on winning weren't finished. She was certain to win it. It only meant staying on for

another week. Well, off she went. I have often spoken to her about it since. She said herself that she didn't know why she had left, that she felt homesick (the home being Paris, you can imagine how likely that was), that she didn't feel happy at Balbec, that she thought that there were people there who were laughing at her."⁷⁷ And I told myself that there was this amount of truth in what Andrée said: that if differences between minds account for the different impressions produced upon one person and another by the same work, for differences of feeling, for the impossibility of captivating a person who does not love you, there are also the differences between characters, the peculiarities of a single character, which are also motives for action. Then I ceased to think about this explanation and said to myself how difficult it is to know the truth in this world. I had indeed observed Albertine's desire to go to Mme Verdurin's and her concealment of it and I had not been mistaken. But then even if we do thus manage to grasp one fact, all the others—the reverse side of the tapestry, the truth behind an action or an intrigue or indeed the intelligence of the heart—that we perceive only in their outward appearances, pass us by, and we see only a succession of flat silhouettes of which we say to ourselves: it is this, it is that; it is because of her, or it is because of someone else. The revelation of the fact that Mlle Vinteuil was expected had seemed to me an explanation all the more logical seeing that Albertine had anticipated it by mentioning her to me. And subsequently had she not refused to swear to me that Mlle Vinteuil's presence gave her no pleasure? And here, with regard to this young man, I remembered a point which I had forgotten; a short time before, while Albertine was living with me, I had met him, and he had been—in contrast to his attitude at Balbec—extremely friendly, even affectionate with me, had begged me to allow him to call on me, which I had declined to do for a number of reasons. And now I realized that it was simply because, knowing that Albertine was living in my house, he had wished to be on good terms with me so as to have every facility for seeing her and for carrying her off from me, and I concluded that he was a scoundrel. Sometime later, when I attended the first performances of this young man's works, no doubt I continued to think that if he had been so anxious to call upon me, it was for Albertine's sake, but, while I felt this to be reprehensible, I remembered that in the past if I had gone down to Doncières, to see Saint-Loup, it was really because I was in love with Mme de Guermantes.⁷⁸ It is true that the situation was not identical, since Saint-

Loup had not been in love with Mme de Guermantes, there was in my affection for him a trace of duplicity perhaps, but no treason. But I reflected afterward that this affection that we feel for the person who possesses the object of our desire is something that we feel equally even if he himself also loves that object. No doubt, we should then resist a friendship that will lead us straight to betrayal. And I think that this is what I have always done. But in the case of those who lack the strength to resist, we cannot say that the friendship that they affect for the possessor is a mere ruse; they feel it sincerely and for that reason display it with an ardor which, once the betrayal is complete, causes the betrayed husband or lover to say with a stupefied indignation: "If you had heard the protestations of affection that the wretch showered on me! That a person should come to rob a man of his treasure, that I can understand. But that he should feel the diabolical need to assure him first of all of his friendship, is a degree of ignominy and perversity that it is impossible to imagine." Now, there is no such perversity in the action, nor even an absolutely clear falsehood. The affection of this sort that Albertine's pseudo-fiancé had manifested for me that day had yet another excuse, being more complex than a simple consequence of his love for Albertine. It had been for a short time only that he had known himself, confessed himself, been anxious to be proclaimed an intellectual. For the first time values other than sporting or carousing existed for him. The fact that I was esteemed by Elstir, by Bergotte, that Albertine had perhaps told him of the way in which I judged writers, which had led her to imagine that I might myself be able to write, had the result that all of a sudden I had become to him (to the new man who he at last realized himself to be) an interesting person with whom he would like to be associated, to whom he would like to confide his plans, whom he would ask perhaps for an introduction to Elstir. So that he was sincere when he asked if he might call on me, expressing a regard for me to which intellectual reasons as well as the thought of Albertine imparted sincerity. No doubt it was not *for that* that he was so eager to come and see me and would have dropped everything in order to do so. But of this last reason that did little more than raise to a sort of impassioned paroxysm the two other reasons, he was perhaps unaware himself, and the other two existed really, as might have existed really in Albertine when she had been eager to go, on the afternoon of the rehearsal, to Mme Verdurin's, the perfectly respectable pleasure that she would feel in meeting again friends of her childhood, who in her eyes were no more

vicious than she was in theirs, in talking to them, in showing them, by the mere fact of her presence at the Verdurins', that the poor little girl whom they had known was now invited to a prominent salon, the pleasure also that she might perhaps have felt in listening to Vinteuil's music. If all this was true, the blush that had risen to Albertine's cheeks when I mentioned Mlle Vinteuil was due to the fact that I had done so in the context of that afternoon party that she had tried to keep secret from me, because of that proposal of marriage of which I was not to know. Albertine's refusal to swear to me that she would not have felt any pleasure in meeting Mlle Vinteuil again at that party had at the moment intensified my torment, strengthened my suspicions, but proved to me in retrospect that she had been determined to be sincere, and even over an innocent matter, perhaps simply because it was an innocent matter. There remained nevertheless what Andrée had told me about her relations with Albertine. Perhaps, however, even without going so far as to believe that Andrée had invented them solely in order that I might not feel happy and might not feel superior to her, I might still suppose that she had slightly exaggerated her account of what she used to do with Albertine, and that Albertine, by a mental reservation, diminished slightly also what she had done with Andrée, making use systematically of certain definitions that I had stupidly formulated upon the subject, finding that her relations with Andrée did not fall into the category of what she was obliged to confess to me and that she could deny them without lying. But why should I believe that it was she rather than Andrée who was lying? Truth and life are very arduous, and there remained to me from them, without my really knowing them, an impression in which sorrow was perhaps actually dominated by exhaustion.⁷⁹

Notes

¹. The stages are the Bois, the conversation with Andrée, and Venice (also said to be the last), and perhaps, for the fourth, the visit to Tansonville.

². In Proust's day, this portrait, *Charles I, King of England, Hunting*, was on view in the Louvre's Salon Carré. Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641) was a Flemish painter who made several portraits of Charles I (1600–1649).

³. Jeanne Bécu, Comtesse du Barry (1743–93), was Louis XV's mistress after the death of Madame de Pompadour. Madame du Barry acquired this portrait for the royal collection and kept it in her bedroom.

⁴. See *Swann's Way*, 393–402.

⁵. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 438.

6. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 104–5.
7. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 445–61.
8. The *particule nobiliaire* (de) before a surname usually indicates aristocratic origin.
9. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 254–56.
10. From 1903 on Proust published a number of articles and excerpts from his writings in *Le Figaro*. For his society pieces, he used a pseudonym such as Tout Paris or Horatio or Dominique.
11. Charlotte-Louise-Adélaïde d’Osmond, Comtesse de Boigne (1781–1866), whose memoirs were published posthumously in 1907, was a good friend of Sainte-Beuve. Her book *Les Récits d’une tante: mémoires de la comtesse de Boigne, née Osmond*, is a model for the imaginary *Mémoires de Madame Beausergeant*, a volume that along with the *Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, is on the grandmother’s reading table. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 250.
12. Étienne-Denis, Duc de Pasquier (1767–1862) was a statesman who became chancellor in 1837. He was a devoted friend of Mme de Boigne.
13. Paul, Duc de Noailles (1802–85) was a historian and an acquaintance of Sainte-Beuve.
14. Césarine d’Arbouville (1810–50) was a novelist and good friend of Sainte-Beuve.
15. From Alfred de Musset’s “Sonnet au lecteur” (1850), the final poem in *Poésies nouvelles*. The line quoted reads “Je veux, quand on m’a lu, qu’on puisse me relire” (When one has read me, I want that person to read me again).
16. Proust’s word is *immobile*, which fits with his notion that we see most people as being always the same whereas those we desire become creatures of flight, containing multitudes.
17. In the first volume, this error is attributed to Eulalie. See *Swann’s Way*, 79.
18. Israelites in the original. Anti-Semites considered even assimilated Jews to be foreigners.
19. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 90.
20. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 88–93.
21. See *The Captive*, 132, note 165.
22. See *The Guermantes Way*, 275.
23. Maurice Rouvier (1842–1911) was president of the Council during a time of crisis between France and Germany over Algeria. Fearing war, Rouvier negotiated for the conference in Algéciras, Spain, called for by Wilhelm II of Germany.
24. The Russo-Japanese War lasted from February 1904 to September 1905 and was disastrous for the Russians. France did not actively participate in the war but did side with Russia against Japan’s encroachment on Chinese territory. The war ended in victory for Japan.
25. On August 4, 1916, *Le Figaro* reported on the marriage of Louis-René de Gramont to Mlle Antoinette de Rochechouart de Mortemart, while the battles of Verdun and the Somme were being fought.
26. In English in the original.
27. Paray-le-Monial is a town in the département of Saône-et-Loire and has been a place of pilgrimage since the twelfth century. The Convent of the Visitation, where Saint Marguerite-Marie lived, was the birthplace of the Cult of the Sacred Heart. *A Proust Dictionary*, by Maxine Arnold Vogely (Troy, N.Y.: Whitson, 1981), 520.
28. Venarey-les-Laumes is a village in the Côte d’Or département in eastern France. Until the death of the Duc de Guermantes’s father, the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes were known as the Prince and Princesse des Laumes.
29. The duchess told this story earlier at the expense of the Prince de Léon. See *The Captive*, 32–33.
30. Bourges is a town in the département of Cher and the ancient capital of Berry, dukedom of Jean de Berry. Its thirteenth-century cathedral, Saint-Étienne, is one of the finest examples of Gothic art and is known for the five portals on the western façade. Some of the most famous books of hours were painted at Bourges, including the *Très Riches Heures de Jean, Duc de Berry*.
31. For Lady Israel, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 99–100.

- [32](#). See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 41.
- [33](#). See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 5.
- [34](#). Just as Mlle Vinteuil's scandalous behavior at Combray was said to be the cause of her father's death, Gilberte's denial of Swann as her father is a form of patricide.
- [35](#). This is a reference to Alfred de Musset's poem, "L'Espoir en Dieu" (1838) from his collection *Poésies nouvelles*. Musset, who was a nonbeliever, expresses in this poem his doubts, his anguish, and his hopes. Some see the poem as a spiritual quest.
- [36](#). Without embarrassment or constraint.
- [37](#). This same anecdote was told earlier. See *The Captive*, 33.
- [38](#). Edward VII (1841–1910) was King of England from the death of his mother, Queen Victoria. He visited Paris on May 1, 1903, to inaugurate the Entente cordiale. In 1908, he exchanged state visits with French President Fallières.
- [39](#). Armand du Lau, Marquis d'Allemans (1651–1726) was a provincial nobleman and an old friend of Saint-Simon, who evoked him when the former visited Paris in 1719.
- [40](#). See *Swann's Way*, 353.
- [41](#). Poitou is a province in west central France; its capital is Poitiers.
- [42](#). Jean-Marc Nattier (1685–1766) was a painter noted for his portraits of the ladies of King Louis XV's court. Eric Karpeles suggests that Proust had in mind such portraits as the one of Mathilde de Canisy, Marquise d'Antin, painted in 1738. The painting is in the Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris. See Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to In Search of Lost Time* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 267.
- [43](#). The Bibliothèque Nationale de France is similar to the Library of Congress and the British Library.
- [44](#). A baignoire (or bainoir) is a large box located on the ground floor or lowest tier of a theater.
- [45](#). See *The Guermantes Way*, 51–58.
- [46](#). In Greek mythology, a Nereid is any of the sea nymphs fathered by Nereus who personify the play of the waves.
- [47](#). In English in the original. This was the traditional hour for afternoon tea.
- [48](#). Your well-deserved success.
- [49](#). Your great success.
- [50](#). My kindest regards.
- [51](#). Mother joins me.
- [52](#). This second revolution in France overturned the older branch of the Bourbons and gave the throne to Louis-Philippe (1773–1850). He was the last king of France (1830–48); his reign was known as the Monarchie de Juillet.
- [53](#). This third revolution in France proclaimed a Republic on February 24, 1848; it was ended by the coup d'état of Louis-Napoléon, later Napoléon III on December 2, 1851.
- [54](#). The Second Empire lasted from 1852 until September 4, 1870 when Napoléon III suffered defeat at the end of the Franco-Prussian War.
- [55](#). This is a reference to French Polynesia, which was made up of several groups of Polynesian islands, the most famous of which is Tahiti. See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 270.
- [56](#). See *Swann's Way*, 66, where Mme Sazerat and her dog appear.
- [57](#). "Oh, my darling, it's in my heart!" Nathalie Mauriac Dyer suggests that Proust may have been quoting from memory the last line of the poem "Fleur de chimère" from Armand Silvestre's collection *Les Tendresses* (1898). The line reads "Car c'est dans mon coeur qu'est la fleur de mon rêve!" (For it's in my heart that dwells the flower of my dreams!). Mauriac Dyer, *La Fugitive* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche 1993), 192, n. 1.
- [58](#). "The dead are sleeping in peace in the bosom of the earth/And thus let sleep our faded feelings/These relics of the heart also conserve their dust/Let no hands disturb their sacred remains." These lines are from "La Nuit d'octobre" by Alfred de Musset.

[59.](#) French for “old hat.”

[60.](#) These lines are from the poem “Aux Tuileries” from the collection *Les Vaines Tendresses* by Sully Prudhomme (1839–1907). “You will make them weep, beautiful and cherished child . . . /All these bambinos, future men/Who are already suspending their youthful reverie/From the caressing lashes of your pure eyes.” Proust slightly altered the third line, which in the original reads “Qui plus tard suspendront leurs jeunes rêveries”: Who later will suspend their youthful reveries.

[61.](#) Charles Cros (1842–88) was a poet and inventor. These lines are taken from the poem “Nocturne,” part of the collection *Le Coffret de santal*. “The first evening that he came here/I abandoned all pride/I told him: ‘You will love me/for as long as you are able.’/I slept well only in his arms.”

[62.](#) This was a periodic military service required of reservists.

[63.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 497–99.

[64.](#) This is Octave, also known as “I’m in a pickle.”

[65.](#) Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.) was a statesman and philosopher who was also considered to be the most eloquent of the Roman orators.

[66.](#) Arthur Rimbaud (1854–91) was one of the most important modern poets and a true prodigy, who had written all his works by the time he was twenty.

[67.](#) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) was a prolific German writer whose most famous work is his play *Faust*.

[68.](#) *Elective Affinities* is a novel by Goethe (1809). In early-nineteenth-century chemistry, the expression “elective affinities” or “chemical affinities” was used to describe compounds that interacted with each other only under selected circumstances. Goethe used the term as a metaphor for marriage and for the conflict between duty and passion.

[69.](#) This is a vehicle drawn by four horses and driven by one person.

[70.](#) The concours général, the most prestigious of academic competitions, consists of public examinations in French composition that date from 1744 and take place annually between the best students in the upper classes of all the secondary schools (lycées and collèges).

[71.](#) Albert, Duc de Broglie (1821–1901) was a statesman who held many public offices, including that of minister of education.

[72.](#) See *Swann’s Way*, 469.

[73.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 557.

[74.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 164.

[75.](#) See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 6–10.

[76.](#) See *The Captive*, 103.

[77.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 575.

[78.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 412.

[79.](#) The earlier Pléiade edition contains a sentence that is the first of the Venice episode and that serves as a transition to the new section: “Quant à la troisième fois où je me souviens d’avoir eu conscience que j’approchais de l’indifférence absolue à l’égard d’Albertine (et cette dernière fois jusqu’à sentir que j’y étais tout à fait arrivé) ce fut un jour, assez long-temps après la dernière visite d’Andrée, à Venise” (As for the third time when I remember having been conscious of nearing an absolute indifference with regard to Albertine [and this last time to the point of feeling that I had completely arrived at it], was a fairly long time after Andrée’s last visit, in Venice). See *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Pléiade edition, 1954), 3: 623.

Chapter 3

Sojourn in Venice

My mother had taken me to spend a few weeks in Venice and—as there may be beauty in the most precious as well as in the humblest things—I received there impressions analogous to those that I had felt so often in the past at Combray but transposed into a wholly different and far richer key. When at ten o'clock in the morning my shutters were thrown open, I saw blazing in the sunlight, instead of the black marble into which the slates of Saint-Hilaire¹ used to turn, the golden angel on the Campanile of Saint Mark's.² Glittering in the sunlight, which made it almost impossible to fix it in space, it promised me with its outstretched arms, for the moment, half an hour later, when I was to appear on the Piazzetta,³ a joy more certain than any that it could ever in the past have been bidden to announce to men of goodwill.⁴ I could see nothing but itself, so long as I remained in bed, but as the whole world is merely a vast sundial, a single lighted segment of which enables us to tell what time it is, on the very first morning I was reminded of the shops in the place de l'Église at Combray, which, on Sunday mornings, were always on the point of shutting when I arrived for Mass, while the straw in the marketplace smelled strongly in the already hot sunlight. But on the second morning, what I saw, when I awoke, what made me get out of bed (because they had taken the place in my consciousness and in my desire of my memories of Combray), were the impressions of my first morning stroll in Venice, Venice where daily life was no less real than that of Combray, where as in Combray on Sunday mornings one had the pleasure of emerging upon a festive street, but where that street was entirely paved with water of a sapphire blue, refreshed by cooler breezes, and of so solid a color that my tired eyes might, in search of relaxation and without fear of its giving way, rest their gaze upon it. Like the worthy folk of the rue de l'Oiseau at Combray,⁵ so in this strange town also, the inhabitants did indeed emerge from houses lined up side by side, along the main street, but the part played there by houses that cast a patch of shade at their feet was in Venice entrusted to palaces of porphyry and jasper, over the arched door of

which the head of a bearded god (projecting from its alignment, like the knocker on a door at Combray) had the effect of darkening with its shadow, not the brownness of the soil but the splendid blue of the water. On the piazza, the shadow that would have been cast at Combray by the draper's awning and the barber's pole turned into little blue flowers scattered at its feet upon the desert of sun-scorched flagstones by the relief of a Renaissance façade, which is not to say that, when the sun beat down, we were not obliged, in Venice as at Combray, to pull down the blinds between ourselves and the canal, but they hung behind the quatrefoils and foliage of Gothic windows. Of this sort was the window in our hotel behind the balusters of which my mother sat waiting for me, gazing at the canal with a patience that she would perhaps not have shown in the old days at Combray, at that time when, placing in me hopes that had never been realized, she was unwilling to let me see how much she loved me. Nowadays she was well aware that an apparent coldness on her part would alter nothing, and the affection that she lavished upon me was like those forbidden foods that are no longer withheld from invalids when it is certain that they are past recovery. True, the humble details that gave an individuality to the window of my Aunt Léonie's bedroom seen from the rue de l'Oiseau, the asymmetry of its position caused by its unequal distance from the windows on either side of it, the exceptional height of its wooden ledge, the slanting bar that served to open the shutters, the two curtains of glossy blue satin, divided and kept apart by their rod, the equivalent of all these things existed in this hotel in Venice where I could hear also those words, so distinctive, so eloquent, which enable us to recognize from a distance the dwelling to which we are going home to lunch, and afterward remain in our memory as testimony that, during a certain period of time, that dwelling was ours; but the task of uttering them had, in Venice, devolved not, as at Combray, and indeed, to a certain extent, everywhere, upon the simplest, that is to say the least beautiful things, but upon the ogive, still half Arab, of a façade that is reproduced among the casts in every museum as one of the supreme achievements of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages; from a long way away and when I had barely passed San Giorgio Maggiore,⁶ I caught sight of this ogival window that had already seen me, and the thrust of its pointed arches added to its smile of welcome the distinction of a loftier, scarcely comprehensible gaze. And since, behind those balusters of differently colored marble, Mamma

was sitting reading while she waited for me to return, her face shrouded in a tulle veil as heartrending in its whiteness as her hair to me who sensed that my mother, hiding her tears, had pinned it to her straw hat, partly with the idea of appearing “dressed” in the eyes of the hotel staff, but principally so as to appear to me less in mourning, less sad, almost consoled for the death of my grandmother; since, not having recognized me at first, as soon as I called to her from the gondola, she sent out to me, from the bottom of her heart, a love that stopped only where there was no longer any material substance to support it, on the surface of her impassioned gaze, which she brought as close to me as possible, and which she tried to thrust forward to the advanced post of her lips, in a smile that seemed to be kissing me, in the framework and beneath the canopy of the more discreet smile of the arched window illuminated by the midday sun; because of this, that window has assumed in my memory the precious quality of things that have had, simultaneously, side by side with us, their part in a certain hour that struck, the same for us and for them; and however full of admirable tracery its mullions may be, that illustrious window retains in my eyes the intimate aspect of a man of genius with whom we have spent a month in some holiday resort, where he has acquired a friendly regard for us; and if, ever since then, whenever I see a cast of that window in a museum, I am obliged to hold back my tears, it is simply because the window says to me the thing that touches me more than anything else in the world: “I remember your mother so well.”

And as I went indoors to join my mother who had left the window, I did indeed recapture, coming from the warm air outside, that sensation of coolness that I had experienced long ago at Combray when I went upstairs to my room, but at Venice it was a breeze from the sea that kept the air cool, and no longer on a little wooden staircase with narrow steps, but on the noble surfaces of steps of marble, splashed at every moment by a shaft of greenish sunlight, which to the valuable instruction in the art of Chardin,⁷ acquired long ago, added a lesson in that of Veronese.⁸ And since in Venice it is to works of art, to things of priceless beauty, that the task is entrusted of giving us our impressions of everyday life, we falsify the character of this city, using the pretext that the Venice of certain painters is coldly esthetic in its most celebrated parts, if we represent only (let us make an exception of the superb studies of Maxime Dethomas)⁹ its poverty-stricken aspects, in

the quarters where everything that creates its splendor is effaced, and, in order to make Venice more intimate and more genuine, give it a resemblance to Aubervilliers.¹⁰ It has been the mistake of some very great artists, that, by a quite natural reaction against the artificial Venice of bad painters, they have attached themselves exclusively to the Venice that they have found more realistic, to some humble *campi*,¹¹ some little deserted *rii*.¹² It was this Venice that I used often to explore in the afternoon, when I did not go out with my mother. The fact was that it was easier to find there women of the people, matchmakers, pearl-stringers, glass or lace makers, working women in black shawls with long fringes whom nothing prevented me from loving, because I had for the most part forgotten Albertine, and who seemed more desirable than others, because I still remembered her a little. Who, moreover, could have told me precisely, in this passionate quest of mine for Venetian women, how much there was of themselves, how much of Albertine, how much of my old, long-cherished desire to visit Venice? Our slightest desire, though unique as a chord, includes the fundamental notes on which our entire life is built. And sometimes if we were to eliminate one of them, even one that we do not hear, that we are not aware of, one that has no connection at all to the object that we are pursuing, we would nevertheless see all of our desire for that object disappear. There were many things that I did not attempt to identify in the excitement I felt as I went in search of Venetian women. My gondola followed the course of the small canals; like the mysterious hand of a genie leading me through the maze of this Oriental city, they seemed, as I advanced, to be carving a path for me through the heart of a crowded quarter that they divided, barely parting with a slender furrow arbitrarily traced, the tall houses with their tiny Moorish windows; and, as though the magic guide had been holding a candle in his hand and were lighting the way for me, they kept casting ahead of them a ray of sunlight for which they cleared a route. One felt that between the poor dwellings that the little canal had just parted and that otherwise would have formed a compact whole, no open space had been reserved. With the result that the campanile or a garden trellis rose sheer above the *rio*, as in a flooded city. But for the churches and for the gardens, thanks to the same transposition as in the Grand Canal, the sea formed so effectively a way of communication, a substitute for street or alley, that on either side of the *canaletto* the churches

rose from the water in this old, populous quarter, degraded into humble, much frequented parish churches, bearing upon their surface the stamp of their necessity, of their use by crowds of simple folk; the gardens traversed by the cutting of the canal allowed their astonished leaves or fruit to trail in the water, and on the ledges of the houses whose crudely hewn stone was still rough as though it had only just been sawn, street urchins surprised by the gondola and keeping their balance and allowing their legs to dangle vertically, like sailors seated on a swing-bridge the two halves of which have been swung apart, allowing the sea to pass between them. Now and again there appeared a handsomer building that happened to be there, like a surprise in a box that we have just opened, a little ivory temple with its Corinthian columns and its allegorical statue on the pediment, somewhat out of place among the ordinary buildings in the midst of which it had survived, and the peristyle, with which the canal provided it, retained the look of a landing place for market gardeners. I had the impression, which my desire heightened further, of not being outside but of entering more and more into the depths of something secret, for each time that I found something new that came to place itself on one side of me or the other, a small monument or an unexpected *campo*, keeping the surprised look of beautiful things that we see for the first time and of which we do not yet completely understand the purpose and the utility. I returned on foot through narrow *calli*,¹³ I accosted plebeian girls as perhaps Albertine had done, and I would have liked to have her with me. Yet these could not have been the same girls; at the time when Albertine was in Venice, they would have been children still. But, after having been in the past, in a basic sense and out of cowardice, unfaithful to each of the desires that I had conceived as unique, since I had sought an analogous object and not the same one that I had no hope of finding again, now I systematically sought women whom Albertine had not known, just as I no longer sought those that I had desired in the past. True, I often happened to recall, with an extraordinary violence of desire some young girl of Méséglise or Paris, or the milkmaid I had seen early in the morning at the foot of a hill during my first journey to Balbec. But alas, I remembered them as they were then, that is to say as they certainly would not be now. So that if in the past I had been led to modify my impression of the uniqueness of a desire by seeking, in place of a convent-girl I had lost sight of, a similar convent-girl, now, in order to recapture the girls who had troubled my adolescence or that of Albertine, I

had to consent to a further departure from the principle of the individuality of desire: what I must look for was not those who were sixteen then, but those who were sixteen today, for now, in the absence of what was most distinctive in the person and that eluded me, what I loved was youth. I knew that the youth of those I had known existed no longer except in my impassioned recollection, and that it was not them, however eager I might be to make contact with them when my memory recalled them to me, that I must cull if I really wanted to harvest the youth and the blossom of the year.

The sun was still high in the sky when I went to meet my mother on the Piazzetta. We called for a gondola. "How your poor grandmother would have loved this simple grandeur!" my mother said to me, pointing to the Doge's Palace, which stood contemplating the sea with the thoughtful expression that had been bequeathed to it by its architect and that it faithfully retained in its mute attendance on its vanished doges. "She would have even loved those soft pink tints, because they avoid mawkish sentimentality. How your grandmother would have loved Venice, and what informality, worthy of nature itself, she would have found in all these beautiful vistas so filled with things that seem to need no formal arrangement but present themselves just as they are, the Doge's Palace with its cubic shape, the columns that you say are those of Herod's palace,¹⁴ right in the middle of the Piazzetta, and even less deliberately placed, put there as though for want of anywhere better, the pillars from Saint-Jean-d'Acre, and those horses on the balcony of Saint Mark's! Your grandmother would have had as much pleasure seeing the sun setting over the Doge's Palace as over a mountain." And there was indeed an element of truth in what my mother said, for as the gondola brought us back along the Grand Canal, we watched on either side of the canal the line of palaces between which we passed reflect the light and hour of the sun on their pink flanks, and change with them, not so much like private habitations and historic buildings as like a chain of marble cliffs at the foot of which one goes out in the evening in a boat to watch the sunset. In this way, the mansions arranged along either bank of the canal made one think of objects of nature, but of a nature that seemed to have created its works with a human imagination. But at the same time (because of the character of the impressions, always urban, that Venice gives us almost in the open sea, upon those waves whose flow and ebb make themselves felt twice daily, and which alternately cover at high tide and uncover at low tide the

splendid outside stairs of the palaces), as we would have done in Paris on the boulevards, in the Champs-Élysées, in the Bois, in any wide and fashionable avenue, we passed the most elegant women in the shimmering evening light, almost all foreigners, who, languidly reclining on the cushions of their floating carriages, took their place in the procession, stopped in front of a palace where there was a friend whom they wished to see, sent to inquire whether she was at home, and while, as they waited for the answer, they prepared to leave a card just in case, as they would have done at the door of the Hôtel de Guermantes, they turned to their guidebook to find out the period, the style of the palace, not without being shaken, as though upon the crest of a blue wave, by the thrust of the glittering, swirling water, which took alarm on finding itself pent between the dancing gondola and the resounding marble. And thus any excursion, even when it was only to pay calls or to go shopping, was threefold and unique in this Venice, where the simplest social coming and going assumed at the same time the form and the charm of a visit to a museum and a trip on the sea.

Several of the palaces on the Grand Canal had been converted into hotels, and, feeling the need of a change, or wishing to be hospitable to Mme Sazerat, whom we had encountered—the unexpected and inopportune acquaintance whom one invariably meets when one travels abroad—and whom Mamma had invited to dine with us, we decided one evening to try a hotel that was not our own, and in which we had been told that the food was better. While my mother was paying the gondolier and taking Mme Sazerat to the drawing room that she had engaged, I slipped away to inspect the great hall of the restaurant with its fine marble pillars and walls and ceiling that were once entirely covered with frescoes, recently and badly restored. Two waiters were conversing in an Italian which I translate:

“Are the old people going to dine in their room? They never let us know. It’s annoying, I never know whether I am to reserve their table (*non so se é bisogna conservar loro la tavola*). And then, too bad if they come down and find their table taken! I don’t understand how they can take in *forestieri*¹⁵ like that in such a chic hotel. They’re not our type of people.”

Notwithstanding his contempt, the waiter was anxious to know what action he was to take with regard to the table and was going to ask the liftboy to go upstairs and inquire, when, before he had had time to do so, he received his answer: he had just caught sight of the old lady who was entering the room. I had no difficulty, despite the air of melancholy and

weariness that comes with the burden of years, and despite a sort of eczema, a red leprosy that covered her face, in recognizing beneath her bonnet, in her black jacket, made by W,¹⁶ but to the untutored eye exactly like that of an old concierge, the Marquise de Villeparisis. As luck would have it, the spot where I was standing, engaged in studying the remains of a fresco, between two of the beautiful marble panels, was directly behind the table at which Mme de Villeparisis had just sat down.

“Then M. de Villeparisis won’t be long. They’ve been here a month now, and it’s only once that they didn’t have a meal together,” said the waiter.

I was asking myself who the relative could be with whom she was traveling and who was named M. de Villeparisis, when I saw, a few moments later, advance toward the table and sit down by her side, her old lover, M. de Norpois.

His great age had weakened the resonance of his voice, but had in compensation given to his speech, formerly so reserved, a positive intemperance. The cause of this was to be sought, perhaps, in certain ambitions for the realization of which little time, he felt, remained to him, and which filled him all the more with vehemence and ardor; perhaps in the fact that, having been discarded from a world of politics to which he longed to return, he imagined, in the naïveté of his desire, that he could turn out of office, by the fierce criticisms that he launched at them, the men he was determined to replace. Thus we see politicians convinced that the cabinet of which they are not members cannot hold out for three days. It would, however, be an exaggeration to suppose that M. de Norpois had entirely lost the traditions of diplomatic speech. Whenever “important matters” were involved, he at once became, as we will see, the man whom we remember in the past, but at all other times he would inveigh against this man and that with the senile violence of certain octogenarians that hurls them into the arms of women to whom they are no longer capable of doing any serious damage.

Mme de Villeparisis preserved, for some minutes, the silence of an old woman who in the exhaustion of age finds it difficult to rise from memories of the past to consideration of the present. Then, turning to one of those eminently practical questions that indicate the survival of a mutual affection:

“Did you call at Salviati’s?”¹⁷

“Yes.”

“Will they send it tomorrow?”

“I brought the bowl back myself. You will see it after dinner. Let’s look at the menu.”

“Did you send instructions about my Suez shares?”

“No; at the present moment the stock exchange is entirely taken up with oil shares. But there is no hurry given the excellent state of the market. Here is the menu. As a first course, there is red mullet. Shall we try them?”

“I will, yes, but you are not allowed them. Ask for a risotto instead. But they don’t know how to cook it.”

“That doesn’t matter. Waiter, some mullet for Madame and a risotto for me.”

A new and prolonged silence.

“Here, I’ve brought you the papers, the *Corriere della Sera*, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*,¹⁸ etc. Do you know, there is a great deal of talk about a diplomatic change, the first scapegoat in which is to be Paléologue,¹⁹ who is notoriously inadequate in Serbia. He will perhaps be replaced by Lozé,²⁰ and there will be a vacancy at Constantinople. But,” M. de Norpois hastened to add in a bitter tone, “for an embassy of such scope, in a capital where it is obvious that Great Britain must always, whatever may happen, occupy the chief place at the bargaining table, it would be prudent to turn to men of experience better equipped to resist the ambushes of the enemies of our British ally than are diplomats of the modern school who would walk blindfolded into the trap.” The angry volubility with which M. de Norpois uttered the last words was due principally to the fact that the newspapers, instead of suggesting his name, as he had requested them to do, named as a “hot favorite” a young minister of foreign affairs. “Heaven knows that the men of years and experience may well hesitate, as a result of all manner of tortuous maneuvers, to put themselves forward in the place of more or less incapable recruits! I have known many of these self-styled diplomats of the empirical method who centered all their hopes in a trial balloon that it did not take me long to deflate. There can be no question that if the government is so lacking in wisdom as to entrust the reins of state to turbulent hands, at the call of duty any conscript will always answer ‘Present!’ But who knows” (and here M. de Norpois appeared to know perfectly well to whom he was referring) “whether it would not be the same on the day when they came in search of some veteran full of wisdom and skill. To my mind,

though everyone may have his own way of looking at things, the post at Constantinople should not be accepted until we have settled our existing difficulties with Germany. We owe no man anything, and it is intolerable that every six months they should come and demand from us, by fraudulent machinations, and extort by force and fear, some quietus or other, always hastily put forward by a venal press. This must cease, and naturally a man of high distinction who has proved his merit, a man who would have, if I may say so, the emperor's ear, would wield greater authority than anyone else in bringing the conflict to an end."

A gentleman who was finishing his dinner bowed to M. de Norpois.

"Why, there is Prince Foggi," said the marquis.

"Ah, I'm not sure that I know who you mean," muttered Mme de Villeparisis.

"Why, of course you do. It is Prince Odon. The brother-in-law of your cousin Doudeauville. Surely you remember that I went shooting with him at Bonnétable?"^{[21](#)}

"Ah! Odon, is he the one who went in for painting?"

"Not at all, he's the one who married the Grand Duke N's sister."

M. de Norpois uttered these remarks in the cross tone of a schoolmaster who is dissatisfied with his pupil and stared fixedly at Mme de Villeparisis out of his blue eyes.

When the prince had drunk his coffee and was leaving his table, M. de Norpois rose, hastened toward him and with a majestic wave of his arm, himself retiring into the background, presented him to Mme de Villeparisis. And during the next few minutes while the prince was standing beside their table, M. de Norpois never ceased for an instant to keep his azure pupils trained on Mme de Villeparisis, from the deference or severity of an old lover, principally from fear of her making one of those verbal solecisms that he had relished but that he dreaded. Whenever she said anything to the prince that was not quite accurate he corrected her mistake and stared into the eyes of the abashed and docile marquise with the steady intensity of a hypnotist.

A waiter came to tell me that my mother was waiting for me, I went to her and made my apologies to Mme Sazerat, saying that I had been amused to see Mme de Villeparisis. At the sound of this name, Mme Sazerat turned pale and seemed about to faint. Controlling herself with an effort: "Mme de Villeparisis, who was Mlle de Bouillon?" she inquired.^{[22](#)}

“Yes.”

“Couldn’t I just get a glimpse of her for a moment? It has been the dream of my life.”

“Then there is no time to lose, Madame, for she will soon have finished her dinner. But why do you take such an interest in her?”

“Because Mme de Villeparisis was, before her second marriage, the Duchesse d’Havré, beautiful as an angel, wicked as a demon, who drove my father out of his senses, ruined him, and then abandoned him immediately. Well, she may have behaved to him like the lowest prostitute, she may have been the cause of our having to live, my family and myself, in a humble position at Combray; now that my father is dead, my consolation is to think that he was in love with the most beautiful woman of his generation, and as I have never set eyes on her, it will be, in spite of everything, a comfort . . .”

I escorted Mme Sazerat, trembling with excitement, to the restaurant and pointed out Mme de Villeparisis.

But, like a blind person who turns his face in the wrong direction, so Mme Sazerat did not bring her gaze to rest upon the table at which Mme de Villeparisis was dining, but, looking toward another part of the room, said: “But she must have gone, I don’t see her where you say she is.”

And she continued to gaze around the room, in quest of the loathed, adored vision that had haunted her imagination for so long.

“Yes, there she is, at the second table.”

“Then we can’t be counting from the same point. At what I count as the second table there are only two people, an old gentleman and a little hunchbacked, red-faced woman, quite hideous.”

“That’s her!”

Meanwhile, Mme de Villeparisis having asked M. de Norpois to invite Prince Foggi to sit down, a friendly conversation followed among the three of them; they discussed politics, the prince declared that he was indifferent to the fate of the cabinet and would spend another week at least at Venice. He hoped that in the interval all risk of a ministerial crisis would have been avoided. Prince Foggi supposed for a moment that these political topics did not interest M. de Norpois, for the latter who until then had been expressing himself with such vehemence had become suddenly absorbed in an almost angelic silence that it seemed could blossom, should his voice return, only into some innocent and melodious tune by Mendelssohn or César Franck.²³ The prince supposed also that this silence was due to the reserve of a

Frenchman who naturally would not wish to discuss Italian affairs in the presence of an Italian. Now in this, the prince was completely mistaken. Silence, an air of indifference were, in M. de Norpois, not a sign of reserve but the usual prelude to an intervention in important affairs. The marquis had his eye upon nothing less (as we have seen) than Constantinople, with a preliminary settlement of the German question, with a view to which he hoped to force the hand of the Rome Cabinet. He considered, in fact, that an action on his part of international significance might be the worthy crown of his career, perhaps even an avenue to new honors, to difficult tasks to which he had not relinquished his pretensions. For old age makes us incapable of doing but not, at first, of desiring. It is only in a third period that those who live to a very great age have relinquished desire, as they have had already to forgo action. They no longer even present themselves as candidates at futile elections that they tried so often to win, such as the president of the Republic, for example. They content themselves with taking the air, eating, reading the newspapers; they have outlived themselves.

The prince, to put the marquis at his ease and to show him that he regarded him as a compatriot, began to speak of the possible successors to the prime minister then in office. A successor who would have a difficult task before him. When Prince Foggi had mentioned more than twenty names of politicians who seemed to him suitable for office, names to which the ex-ambassador listened with his eyelids drooping over his blue eyes and without moving a muscle, M. de Norpois broke his silence at length to utter those words that were for a score of years to supply the chancelleries with food for conversation, and afterward, when they had been forgotten, would be exhumed by some personage signing himself “One Who Knows” or “Testis”²⁴ or “Machiavelli”²⁵ in a newspaper in which the very oblivion into which they had fallen entitled them to create a new sensation. As I say, Prince Foggi had mentioned more than twenty names to the diplomat who remained as motionless and mute as though he were stone deaf when M. de Norpois raised his head slightly, and, in the form that had been assumed by those of his diplomatic interventions that had had the most far-reaching consequences, albeit this time with greater audacity and less brevity, asked shrewdly: “And has no one mentioned the name of Signor Giolitti?”²⁶ At these words the scales fell from Prince Foggi’s eyes; he could hear a celestial murmur. Then at once M. de Norpois began to speak about one

thing and another, no longer afraid to make a sound, as, when the last note of a sublime aria by Bach has been played, the audience is no longer afraid to talk aloud, to call for their hats and coats in the cloakroom. He made the difference even more marked by begging the prince to pay his most humble respects to Their Majesties the King and Queen when next he should see them, a farewell phrase that corresponds to the shout for a coachman at the end of a concert: "Auguste, from the rue de Belloy."²⁷ We cannot say what exactly were Prince Foggi's impressions. He must certainly have been delighted to have heard the gem: "And has no one mentioned the name of Signor Giolitti?" For M. de Norpois, in whom age had destroyed or deranged his most outstanding qualities, had on the other hand, as he grew older, perfected his bravura, as certain aged musicians, who in all other respects have declined, acquire and retain until the end, in the matter of chamber music, a perfect virtuosity that they did not formerly possess.

However that may be, Prince Foggi, who had intended to spend two weeks in Venice returned to Rome that very night and was received a few days later in audience by the king in connection with properties, as we may perhaps have mentioned already, the prince owned in Sicily. The cabinet hung on for longer than might have been expected. When it fell, the king consulted various statesmen as to the most suitable head of the new cabinet. Then he sent for Signor Giolitti, who accepted. Three months later a newspaper reported Prince Foggi's meeting with M. de Norpois. The conversation was reported as we have given it here, with the difference that, instead of: "M. de Norpois asked shrewdly," one read: "M. de Norpois said with that shrewd and charming smile that is so characteristic of him." M. de Norpois considered that "shrewdly" had in itself sufficient explosive force for a diplomat and that this addition was, to say the least, untimely. He had even asked the Quai d'Orsay to issue an official denial, but the Quai d'Orsay did not know which way to turn. In fact, ever since the conversation had been made public, M. Barrère²⁸ had been telegraphing several times hourly to Paris, complaining about this unofficial ambassador to the Quirinal and describing the indignation with which the incident had been received throughout the whole of Europe. This indignation was nonexistent, but the other ambassadors were too polite to contradict M. Barrère when he assured them that there could be no question about everybody's being furious. M. Barrère, listening only to his own thoughts, mistook this courteous silence for assent. Immediately he telegraphed to

Paris: "I have just had an hour's conversation with the Marchese Visconti-Venosta,"²⁹ and so forth. His secretaries were worn out.

M. de Norpois, however, could count upon the devotion of a French newspaper of very long standing, which indeed in 1870, when he was French minister in a German capital, had rendered him an important service. This paper (especially its leading article, which was unsigned) was admirably written. But the paper became a thousand times more interesting when this leading article (styled "premier-Paris" in those far-off days and now, no one knows why, "editorial") was on the contrary badly expressed, with endless repetitions of words. Everyone sensed then, with excitement, that the article had been "inspired." Perhaps by M. de Norpois, perhaps by some other leading man of the hour. To give an anticipatory idea of the Italian incident, let us show how M. de Norpois made use of this paper in 1870, to no purpose, it may be thought, since war broke out nevertheless; most efficaciously, according to M. de Norpois, whose axiom was that we ought first and foremost to prepare public opinion. His articles, every word in which was weighed, resembled those optimistic bulletins that are at once followed by the death of the patient. For example, on the eve of the declaration of war, in 1870, when mobilization was almost complete, M. de Norpois (remaining, of course, in the background) had felt it to be his duty to send to this famous newspaper the following "editorial":

"The opinion seems to prevail in authoritative circles, that since the afternoon hours of yesterday, the situation, without of course being of an alarming nature, might well be envisaged as serious and even, from certain angles, as susceptible of being regarded as critical. M. le Marquis de Norpois would appear to have held several conversations with the Prussian minister, in order to examine in a firm and conciliatory spirit, and in a wholly concrete fashion, the different causes of friction that, if we may say so, exist. Unfortunately, we have not yet heard, at the time of going to press, that Their Excellencies have been able to agree upon a formula that may serve as base for a diplomatic instrument."

Latest news: "We have learned with satisfaction in well-informed circles that a slight slackening of tension appears to have occurred in Franco-Prussian relations. We would attach special importance to the fact that M. de Norpois is reported to have met the British minister 'unter den Linden'³⁰ and to have conversed with him for fully twenty minutes. This report is regarded as highly satisfactory." (There was added, in brackets, after the

word “satisfactory” its German equivalent *befriedigend*.) And on the following day one read in the editorial: “It would appear that, notwithstanding all the dexterity of M. de Norpois, to whom everyone must hasten to render homage for the skill and energy with which he has managed to defend the inalienable rights of France, a rupture is now, so to speak, virtually inevitable.”

The newspaper could not refrain from following an editorial couched in this vein with a selection of comments, furnished of course by M. de Norpois. The reader may perhaps have observed in these last pages that the “conditional” was one of the ambassador’s favorite grammatical forms in the literature of diplomacy. (“Particular importance would appear to be attached” for “Particular importance is attached.”) But the present indicative employed not in its usual sense but in that of the old “optative”³¹ was no less dear to M. de Norpois. The comments that followed the editorial were as follows:

“Never has the public shown themselves so admirably calm” (M. de Norpois would have liked to believe that this was true but feared that it was precisely the opposite of the truth). “It is weary of fruitless agitation and has learned with satisfaction that His Majesty’s Government would assume its responsibilities according to the eventualities that might occur. The public asks” (optative) “nothing more. To its splendid sangfroid, which is in itself a token of victory, we will add a piece of intelligence amply qualified to reassure public opinion, were there any need of that. We are, indeed, assured that M. de Norpois who, for reasons of health, was ordered long ago to return to Paris for medical treatment, would appear to have left Berlin where he considered that his presence no longer served any purpose.” Latest news: “His Majesty the Emperor left Compiègne³² this morning for Paris in order to confer with the Marquis de Norpois, the minister of war and Maréchal Bazaine³³ in whom public opinion has absolute confidence. H. M. the Emperor has canceled the banquet that he was to give for his sister-in-law the Duchess of Alba. This action created everywhere, as soon as it became known, a particularly favorable impression. The emperor has held a review of his troops, whose enthusiasm is indescribable. Several corps, by virtue of a mobilization order issued immediately upon the sovereign’s arrival in Paris, are, in any contingency, ready to move in the direction of the Rhine.”

Sometimes at dusk as I returned to the hotel I felt that the Albertine of long ago, invisible to my eyes, was nevertheless enclosed within me as in the “*Piombi*”³⁴ of an inner Venice, the solid lid of which some incident occasionally slid apart to give me a glimpse of that past.

Thus, for example, one evening a letter from my stockbroker reopened for me for an instant the gates of the prison in which Albertine dwelled within me, alive, but so remote, so profoundly buried that she remained inaccessible to me. Since her death I had ceased to take any interest in the speculations that I had made in order to have more money for her. But time had passed; the wisest judgments of the previous generation had been belied by this generation, as had occurred in the past to M. Thiers,³⁵ who had said that railways could never prove successful, and the stocks of which M. de Norpois had said to us: “Even if your income from them is not very great, you may be certain at least that your capital will never depreciate,” were, more often than not, those that had declined most in value. In the case of my English Consols and Raffineries Say³⁶ shares alone, I had to pay out such considerable sums in brokers’ commissions, as well as interest and contango fees, that in a rash moment I decided to sell out everything and found that I now possessed barely a fifth of the fortune that I had had when Albertine was alive. This became known at Combray among the surviving members of our family and their friends, and, as they knew that I went about with the Marquis de Saint-Loup and the Guermantes family, they said to themselves: “Pride goes before a fall!” They would have been greatly astonished to learn that it was for a girl of Albertine’s humble condition, almost a protégée of my grandmother’s former piano teacher, Vinteuil, that I had made these speculations. Besides, in that Combray world in which everyone is classified forever according to the income that he is known to enjoy, as in an Indian caste, it would have been impossible for anyone to form any idea of the great freedom that prevailed in the world of the Guermantes, where people attached no importance to wealth and where poverty was regarded as being as disagreeable, but no more degrading, as having no more effect on a person’s social position, than would a stomachache. Doubtless they imagined, on the contrary, at Combray that Saint-Loup and M. de Guermantes must be ruined aristocrats, whose châteaux were mortgaged, to whom I had been lending money, whereas if I had been ruined they would have been the first to offer, to no avail, to come

to my assistance. As for my comparative penury, it was all the more awkward at the moment inasmuch as my Venetian interests had been concentrated for some little time past on a rosy-cheeked³⁷ young glass vendor who offered to the delighted eye a whole range of orange tones and filled me with such a longing to see her again daily that, realizing that my mother and I would soon be leaving Venice, I had made up my mind that I would try to create some sort of position for her in Paris, which would spare me the distress of parting from her. The beauty of her seventeen summers was so noble, so radiant, that it was like acquiring a genuine Titian³⁸ before leaving the place. And would the scant remains of my fortune be sufficient temptation to her to make her leave her native land and come to live in Paris for my sole convenience? But as I came to the end of the stockbroker's letter, a sentence in which he said: "I will look after your credits" reminded me of a scarcely less hypocritically professional expression that the bath attendant at Balbec had used in speaking to Aimé of Albertine. "It was I that looked after her," she had said. And these words, which had never again entered my mind, acted like an "Open, sesame!" upon the hinges of the prison door. But a moment later the door closed once more upon the immured victim—whom I was not to blame for not wishing to join, since I was no longer able to see her, to call her to mind, and since other people exist for us only through the idea that we have of them—but who had for an instant seemed to me so touching because of my desertion of her, although she was unaware of it, that I had for the duration of a lightning flash thought with longing of the time, already remote, when I used to suffer night and day from the companionship of her memory. Another time at San Giorgio degli Schiavoni,³⁹ an eagle accompanying one of the Apostles,⁴⁰ and stylized in the same manner, revived the memory and almost the suffering caused by the two rings the similarity of which Françoise had revealed to me, and as to which I had never learned who had given them to Albertine. Finally, one evening, an incident occurred of such a nature that it seemed as though my love must revive. No sooner had our gondola stopped at the hotel steps than the porter handed me a telegram that the messenger had already brought three times to the hotel, for owing to the inaccurate rendering of the recipient's name (which I recognized nevertheless, through the corruptions introduced by Italian clerks, as my own) the post office required a signed receipt certifying that the telegram was indeed for myself.

I opened it as soon as I was in my own room, and, glancing through the message that was filled with inaccurately transmitted words, managed nevertheless to make out: MY DEAR, YOU THINK ME DEAD, FORGIVE ME, I AM QUITE ALIVE, WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU, TALK ABOUT MARRIAGE, WHEN DO YOU RETURN? LOVE, ALBERTINE. Then there occurred in me in reverse order a process parallel to that which had occurred in the case of my grandmother: when I had learned the fact of my grandmother's death, I had not at first felt any grief. And I had been really grieved by her death only when certain involuntary memories had brought her alive again for me.⁴¹ Now that Albertine was no longer alive for me in my mind, the news that she was alive did not cause me the joy that I might have expected. Albertine had been nothing more to me than a bundle of thoughts, she had survived her bodily death so long as those thoughts were alive in me; on the other hand, now that those thoughts were dead, Albertine did not in any way revive for me in her bodily form. And when I realized that I felt no joy at the thought of her being alive, that I no longer loved her, I ought to have been more astounded than a person who, looking at himself in a mirror, after months of travel, or of illness, discovers that he has white hair and a different face, that of a middle-aged or an old man. This astounds us because its message is: "The man that I was, the blond young man no longer exists, I am another person." And yet, was not the impression that I now felt the proof of as profound a change, as total a death of my former self and of the no less complete substitution of a new self for that former self, as is proved by the sight of a wrinkled face capped with a white wig instead of the face of long ago? But we are no more distressed at having become another person, after a lapse of years and in the natural sequence of time, than we are disturbed at any given moment by the fact of our being, one after another, the incompatible persons, malicious, sensitive, refined, caddish, unsympathetic, ambitious, which we are, in turn, every day of our life. And the reason why this does not distress us is the same, namely that the self that has been eclipsed—momentarily in this latter case and when it is a question of character, permanently in the former case and when it is a matter of passions—is not present to deplore the other, the other that is for the moment, or for all time, our whole self; the caddish self laughs at his own caddishness, because he is the cad, and the forgetful self is not sad about his loss of memory precisely because he has forgotten.

I would have been incapable of resuscitating Albertine because I was incapable of resuscitating myself, of resuscitating the self of those days. Life, according to its habit which is, by incessant, infinitesimal labors, to change the face of the world, had not said to me on the morrow of Albertine's death: "Become another person," but, by changes too imperceptible for me to be conscious even that I was changing, had altered almost everything in me, with the result that my mind was already accustomed to its new master—my new self—when it became aware that it had changed; it was upon this new master that it depended. My affection for Albertine, my jealousy depended, as we have seen, upon the irradiation by the association of ideas of certain pleasant or painful impressions, upon the memory of Mlle Vinteuil at Montjouvin, upon the precious goodnight kisses that Albertine used to bestow on my neck. But in proportion as these impressions had grown fainter, the vast field of impressions that they colored with a hue that was agonizing or soothing began to resume its neutral tint. As soon as oblivion had taken hold of certain dominant points of suffering and pleasure, the resistance offered by my love was overcome, I was no longer in love with Albertine. I tried to recall her image to my mind. I had been right in my presentiment when, a couple of days after Albertine's flight, I was appalled by the discovery that I had been able to live for forty-eight hours without her. It had been the same as when I wrote to Gilberte long ago saying to myself: "If this goes on for a year or two, I will no longer be in love with her." And if, when Swann asked me to come and see Gilberte again, this had seemed to me as embarrassing as greeting a dead woman, in Albertine's case death—or what I had supposed to be death—had achieved the same result as a prolonged rupture in Gilberte's. Death merely acts in the same way as absence. The monster at whose apparition my love had trembled, oblivion, had indeed, as I had feared, ended by devouring that love. Not only did the news that she was alive fail to revive my love, not only did it allow me to realize how far I had already proceeded on the way toward indifference, it at once and so abruptly accelerated that process that I asked myself whether in the past the converse report, that of Albertine's death, had not in like manner, by completing the effect of her departure, intensified my love and delayed its decline. And now that the knowledge that she was alive and the possibility of our reunion made her all of a sudden so worthless in my sight, I asked myself whether Françoise's insinuations, our rupture itself, and even her death (imaginary, but supposed

to be real) had not prolonged my love, so true is it that the efforts of third persons and even those of fate, in separating us from a woman, succeed only in attaching us to her. Now it was the contrary process that had occurred. Anyhow, I tried to recall her image and perhaps because I had only to raise my finger to have her once more to myself, the memory that came to me was that of a very stout, mannish-looking girl from whose colorless face protruded already, like a sprouting seed, the profile of Mme Bontemps. What she might or might not have done with Andrée or with other girls no longer interested me. I no longer suffered from the malady that I had so long thought to be incurable, and really I might have foreseen this. Certainly, regret for a lost mistress, jealousy that survives her death are physical maladies fully as much as tuberculosis or leukemia. And yet among physical maladies it is possible to distinguish those that are caused by a purely physical agency, and those that act upon the body only through the medium of intelligence. If the part of the mind that serves as carrier is the memory—that is to say if the cause is obliterated or remote—however agonizing the pain, however profound the disturbance to the organism may appear to be, it is very seldom (the mind having a capacity for renewal or rather an incapacity for conservation that the tissues lack) that the prognosis is not favorable. At the end of a given period after which a man who has been attacked by cancer will be dead, it is very seldom that the grief of an inconsolable widower or father is not healed. Mine was healed. Was it for this girl whom I saw in my mind's eye so corpulent and who had certainly aged as the girls whom she had loved had aged—was it for her that I must renounce the dazzling girl who was my memory of yesterday, my hope for tomorrow, to whom I could give nothing, any more than to any other, if I married Albertine, that I must renounce this “new Albertine” whom I loved “not such as the Underworld had beheld her . . . but faithful, and proud, and even a trifle shy”?⁴² It was she who was now what Albertine had been in the past: my love for Albertine had been but a transitory form of my devotion to youth. We think that we are in love with a girl, whereas we love in her, alas! only that dawn the glow of which is momentarily reflected on her face. The night passed. In the morning I gave the telegram back to the hotel porter explaining that it had been brought to me by mistake and that it was not addressed to me. He told me that now that it had been opened he might get into trouble, that it would be better if I kept it; I put it back in my pocket but promised that I would act as though I had never received it. I had

definitely ceased to love Albertine. So that this love after departing so widely from the course that I had anticipated, when I remembered my love for Gilberte, after obliging me to make so long and painful a detour, itself too ended, after furnishing an exception, by merging itself, just like my love for Gilberte, in the general rule of oblivion.

But then I thought to myself: I used to value Albertine more than myself; I no longer value her now because for a certain time past I have ceased to see her. But my desire not to be parted from myself by death, to rise again after my death, that desire was not like the desire never to be separated from Albertine, it still persisted. Was this due to the fact that I valued myself more highly than her, that when I was in love with her I loved myself even more? No, it was because, having ceased to see her, I had ceased to love her, whereas I had not ceased to love myself because my everyday links to myself had not been severed like those to Albertine. But if the links to my body, to myself were severed also . . . ? Obviously, it would be the same. Our love of life is only an old liaison of which we do not know how to rid ourselves. Its strength lies in its permanence. But death that severs it will cure us of the desire for immortality.

After lunch, when I was not going to roam about Venice by myself, I went up to my room to get ready to go out with my mother and to fetch the notebooks that I would use to take notes for a work that I was doing on Ruskin.⁴³ In the abrupt angles of the walls I sensed the restrictions imposed by the sea, the parsimony of the soil. And when I went downstairs to join Mamma who was waiting for me, at that hour when, at Combray, it was so pleasant to feel the sun close at hand in the darkness preserved by closed shutters, here, from top to bottom of the marble staircase where one could no more tell than in a Renaissance painting whether it was in a palace or on a galley, the same coolness and the same sense of the splendor of the scene outside were imparted, thanks to the awning that stirred outside the ever-open windows through which, upon an incessant stream of air, the warm shade and the greenish sunlight flowed as though over a liquid surface and suggested the weltering proximity, the glitter, the shimmering instability of the sea. More often than not we would set out for Saint Mark's, with all the more pleasure because, since we had to take a gondola to go there, the church represented for me not a simple monument but the terminus of a voyage on this vernal, maritime water, with which, in my mind, Saint Mark's formed an indivisible and living whole. My mother and I would

enter the baptistery, treading on the marble and glass mosaics of the paving,⁴⁴ having in front of us the wide arcades whose curved and pink surfaces have been slightly warped by time,⁴⁵ which gives the church, wherever the freshness of this coloring has been preserved, the appearance of having been built of a soft and malleable material like the wax in a giant honeycomb; there, on the contrary, where time has hardened the material and artists have embellished it with gold tracery, it appears to be the precious binding, in the finest Cordoba leather, of the colossal Gospel of Venice. Seeing that I needed to spend some time in front of the mosaics depicting the baptism of Christ, and feeling the icy coolness that permeated the baptistery, my mother threw a shawl over my shoulders. When I was with Albertine at Balbec, I felt that she was revealing one of the insubstantial illusions that fill the minds of so many people who do not think clearly, when she spoke to me of the pleasure—to my mind baseless—that she would derive from seeing paintings with me. Today I am at least sure that the pleasure does exist, if not of seeing, at least of having seen a beautiful thing with a particular person. A time has come for me when, remembering the baptistery—contemplating the waters of the Jordan in which Saint John immerses Christ, while the gondola awaited us at the landing stage of the Piazzetta—it is no longer a matter of indifference to me that, beside me in that cool penumbra, there should have been a woman draped in her mourning with the respectful and enthusiastic fervor of the old woman in Carpaccio's *Saint Ursula*,⁴⁶ and that that woman, with her red cheeks and sad eyes and in her black veils, whom nothing can ever remove from that softly lit sanctuary of Saint Mark's where I am always sure to find her because she has her place reserved there as immutably as a mosaic, should be my mother. Carpaccio, whom I just mentioned, was the painter we visited most readily when I was not working in Saint Mark's, almost succeeded in reviving my love for Albertine. I was seeing for the first time *The Patriarch of Grado Exorcising a Demoniac*.⁴⁷ I looked at the marvelous rose-pink and violet sky and the tall encrusted chimneys silhouetted against it, their flared stacks, blossoming like red tulips, reminiscent of so many Whistlers of Venice.⁴⁸ Then my eyes traveled from the old wooden Rialto⁴⁹ to that fifteenth-century Ponte Vecchio⁵⁰ with its marble palaces decorated with gilded capitals, and returned to the canal on which the boats are maneuvered by adolescents in pink jackets and plumed

toques, the spitting image of those avowedly inspired by Carpaccio in that dazzling *Legend of Joseph* by Sert, Strauss, and Kessler.⁵¹ Finally, before leaving the painting, my eyes came back to the shore, swarming with the everyday Venetian life of the period. I looked at the barber wiping his razor, at the Negro carrying his barrel, at the Muslims conversing, at the noblemen in wide-sleeved brocade and damask robes and hats of cerise velvet, and suddenly I felt a slight gnawing at my heart. On the back of one of the *Compagnie della Calza*⁵² identifiable from the emblem, embroidered in gold and pearls on their sleeves or their collars, of the merry confraternity to which they were affiliated, I had just recognized the cloak that Albertine had put on to come with me to Versailles in an open car on the evening when I so little suspected that scarcely fifteen hours separated me from the moment of her departure from my house. Always ready for anything, when I had asked her to come out on that melancholy evening that she was to describe in her last letter as a “twofold twilight since night was falling and we were about to part,”⁵³ she had flung over her shoulders a Fortuny cloak that she had taken away with her the next day and that I had never thought of since. It was from this Carpaccio painting that that inspired son of Venice had taken it, it was from the shoulders of this *Compagnie della Calza* that he had removed it in order to drape it over the shoulders of so many Parisian women who were certainly unaware, as I had been until then, that the model for it existed in a group of seigneurs in the foreground of the *Patriarch of Grado* in a room in the Accademia in Venice. I had recognized everything in it and, that forgotten cloak having restored to me as I looked at it the eyes and the heart of him who had set out that evening with Albertine for Versailles, I was overcome for a few moments by a vague and soon dissipated feeling of desire and melancholy.

There were days when my mother and I were not content with visiting the museums and churches of Venice, and once, when the weather was particularly fine, in order to see the “Virtues” and “Vices” of which M. Swann had given me reproductions⁵⁴ that were probably still hanging on the wall of the schoolroom at Combray, we went as far afield as Padua.⁵⁵ After walking in the glare of the sun across the garden of the Arena,⁵⁶ I entered the Giotto chapel, the entire ceiling of which and the background of the frescoes are so blue that it seems as though the radiant day has crossed the threshold with the human visitor, and has come in for a moment to stow

away in the shade and coolness of its pure sky, a sky of a slightly deeper blue now that it is rid of the sun's gilding, as in those brief spells of respite that interrupt the finest days, when, without our having noticed any cloud, the sun having turned his gaze elsewhere for a moment, the azure, more exquisite still, grows deeper. In this sky transported upon the blue-washed stone, I saw for the first time flying angels,⁵⁷ for M. Swann had given me reproductions only of the Vices and Virtues and not of the frescoes depicting the life of the Virgin and of Christ.⁵⁸ Watching the flight of these angels, I had the same impression of actual movement, literally real action that the gestures of Charity and Envy had given me. With so intense a celestial, or at least an infantile, obedience and ardor, with which their tiny hands are joined, they are depicted in the Arena chapel as winged creatures of a particular species that had really existed, that must have figured in the natural history of biblical and apostolic times. They are little creatures that never fail to fly before the saints when the latter walk abroad; there are always some to be seen fluttering above them, and as they are real creatures with a genuine power of flight, we see them soar upward, describe curves, "loop the loop" without the slightest difficulty, plunge toward the earth head first with the aid of wings that enable them to support themselves in positions that defy the law of gravity, and they remind us far more of a variety of extinct birds or of young pupils of Garros⁵⁹ practicing gliding, than of the angels of the art of the Renaissance and later periods whose wings have become nothing more than emblems and whose deportment is generally the same as that of heavenly beings who are not winged.

On returning to the hotel, I would meet young women, mainly Austrians, who came to Venice to spend the first fine days of this flowerless spring. There was one in particular whose features did not resemble Albertine's but who attracted me by the same fresh complexion, the same merry, lighthearted look. Soon I became aware that I was beginning to say the same things to her that I had said to Albertine at the beginning, that I concealed the same sorrow when she told me that she would not be seeing me the following day because she was going to Verona, and immediately I wanted to go to Verona too. It did not last—she was to leave for Austria and I would never see her again, but already, vaguely jealous as we are when we begin to fall in love, looking at her charming and enigmatic face I asked myself whether she too loved women, whether what she had in common

with Albertine, that clear complexion and her bright eyes, that air of friendly candor that charmed everyone and that stemmed more from the fact that she was not in the least bit interested in knowing about other people's actions, which interested her not at all, than that she was confessing her own, which on the contrary she concealed beneath the most puerile lies—whether all this constituted the morphological characteristics of the woman who loves other women. Was it this about her that, without my being able rationally to grasp why, exercised its attraction on me, caused my anxieties (perhaps a deeper cause of my attraction toward her by virtue of the fact that we are drawn toward what will make us suffer), gave me when I saw her so much pleasure and sadness, like those magnetic fields that we do not see and that in the air of certain places cause us such discomfort? Alas, I would never know. I would have liked, when I tried to read her face, to say to her: “You should tell me, it would interest me as the discovery of a law of human natural history,” but she would never tell me. She professed for anything that resembled that vice a particular horror and showed a definite coldness toward her women friends. Perhaps this was indeed proof that she had something to conceal, that she had been mocked or shamed because of it, and that the air that she assumed to prevent people from thinking such things about her was like an animal's instinctive and revealing recoil from someone who has beaten it. As for my finding out about her life, that was impossible; even in the case of Albertine, how long had it taken me to find out anything! It had taken her death to loosen tongues, for Albertine had conducted herself, like this young woman, with such prudent circumspection! And even in Albertine's case, could I be certain that I knew anything? And then just as the conditions of life that we most desire become a matter of indifference to us if we cease to love the person who, without our realizing it, made us desire them because they allowed us to be near her, to please her as much as possible, the same is true of certain kinds of intellectual curiosity. The scientific importance that I saw in knowing the kind of desire that lay hidden beneath the delicate pink of those cheeks, in the brightness, a sunless brightness as at daybreak, of those pale eyes, in those days that were never accounted for, would doubtless disappear when I had entirely ceased to love Albertine or when I no longer loved this young woman at all.

After dinner, I went out alone, into the heart of the enchanted city where I found myself wandering in strange quarters like a character in *The Arabian*

Nights. It was very seldom that I did not, in the course of my wanderings, discover some strange and spacious piazza of which no guidebook, no tourist had ever told me. I had plunged into a network of little alleys, calli. In the evening, with their high funnel-shaped chimneys⁶⁰ to which the sun gives the brightest pinks, the clearest reds, it is an entire garden blossoming above the houses, its shades so various that you would have said that it was the garden of a tulip lover from Delft or Haarlem,⁶¹ planted on top of the town. And moreover, the extreme proximity of the houses made of every window casement a frame from which a daydreaming cook gazed out, or in which a seated girl was having her hair combed by an old woman whose face, barely visible in the shadows, looked like a witch's—made of each humble, silent house, so close together due to the extreme narrowness of the calli, an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings placed side by side. Tightly packed one next to the other, these calli dissecting in all directions by their ramifications the quarter of Venice isolated between a canal and the lagoon, as if it had crystallized along these innumerable, slender, capillary lines. All of a sudden, at the end of one of these little streets, it seemed as though a distension had occurred in the crystallized matter. A vast and splendid campo of which I could certainly never, in this network of little streets, have guessed the scale, or even found room for it, spread out before me surrounded by charming palaces silvery in the moonlight. It was one of those architectural ensembles toward which, in any other town, the streets converge, lead you and point the way. Here it seemed to be deliberately concealed in a labyrinth of alleys, like those palaces in Oriental tales to which mysterious agents convey by night a person who, taken home again before daybreak, can never again find his way back to the magic dwelling that he ends by believing that he visited only in a dream. The next day I set out in quest of my beautiful nocturnal piazza, I followed calli that were exactly alike one another and refused to give me the smallest bit of information, except such as would lead me farther astray. Sometimes a vague landmark that I seemed to recognize led me to suppose that I was about to see appear, in its seclusion, solitude and silence, the beautiful exiled piazza. At that moment, some evil genie that had assumed the form of a new calle made me turn and unwittingly retrace my steps, and I found myself suddenly brought back to the Grand Canal. And as there is no great difference between the memory of a dream and the memory of a reality, I ended by asking myself whether it was not during my sleep that there had

occurred in a dark patch of Venetian crystallization that strange mirage that offered a vast piazza surrounded by romantic palaces to the meditative eye of the moon.

But it was the desire not to lose forever certain women, far more than certain places, that kept me while in Venice in a state of agitation that became febrile on the day when, toward the end of the day on which my mother had decided that we should leave and our luggage was already on the way to the station in a gondola, I read in the register of foreign guests expected at the hotel: “Baronne Putbus and her entourage.” Immediately, the thought of all the hours of carnal pleasure that our departure would deprive me of raised this desire, which existed in me in a chronic state, to the height of a feeling, and drowned it in a vague melancholy; I asked my mother to put off our departure for a few days, and her air of not taking my request into consideration, of not even listening to it seriously, reawakened in my nerves, exacerbated by the Venetian springtime, that old desire to rebel against an imaginary plot woven against me by my parents, who imagined that I would be forced to obey them, that fighting spirit that drove me in the past to brutally impose my will upon the people whom I loved best in the world, though prepared to conform to their wishes after I had succeeded in making them yield. I told my mother that I would not leave Venice, but she, thinking it more to her purpose not to appear to believe that I was saying this seriously, did not even answer. I went on to say that she would soon see whether I was serious or not. The porter brought three letters, two for her, one for me that I put in my wallet with all the others without even looking at the envelope. And when the hour came at which, accompanied by all my belongings, she set off for the station, I ordered a drink to be brought out to me on the terrace overlooking the canal, and settled down there, watching the sunset, while from a boat that had stopped in front of the hotel a musician sang “O sole mio.”⁶² The sun continued to sink. My mother must be nearing the station. Soon she would be gone, and I would be left alone in Venice, alone with the misery of knowing that I had distressed her, and without her presence to comfort me. The hour of the train’s departure was approaching. My irrevocable solitude was so near at hand that it seemed to me to have begun already and to be complete. For I felt myself to be alone, things had become alien to me; I was no longer calm enough to break out of my throbbing heart and introduce into them a measure of stability. The town that I saw before me had ceased to be

Venice. Its personality, its name, seemed to me to be mendacious fictions that I no longer had the courage to impress upon its stones. I saw the palaces reduced to their simple parts, lifeless heaps of marble with nothing to choose between them, and the water as a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, eternal, blind, anterior and exterior to Venice, unaware of doges or of Turner.⁶³ And yet this unremarkable place was as strange as a place at which we have just arrived, which does not yet know us, or like a place that we have left and that has forgotten us already. I could no longer tell it anything about myself, I could leave nothing of myself imprinted upon it, it contracted me into myself; I was nothing more than a heart that throbbed, and an attention strained to follow the development of “O sole mio.” In vain might I fix my mind despairingly upon the beautiful and distinctive curve of the Rialto, it seemed to me, with the mediocrity of the obvious, a bridge not merely inferior to but as different from the idea that I had of it as an actor with regard to whom, notwithstanding his blond wig and black garments, we know quite well that in his essence he is not Hamlet. So the palaces, the canal, the Rialto became divested of the idea that created their individuality and dissolved into their vulgar material elements. But at the same time this mediocre place seemed to me remote. In the basin of the arsenal,⁶⁴ because of an element that itself also was scientific, namely latitude, there was that singularity in things that, even when similar in appearance to those of our own land, reveal themselves to be alien, in exile beneath other skies; I felt that that horizon so close at hand, which I could have reached in an hour, was a curvature of the earth quite different from those made by the seas of France, a remote curvature that, by the artifice of travel, happened to be moored close to where I was; so that this arsenal basin, at once insignificant and remote, filled me with that blend of disgust and fear that I had felt as a child when I first accompanied my mother to the Deligny baths;⁶⁵ indeed in that fantastic place consisting of a dark water reflecting neither sky nor sun, which nevertheless amid its fringe of cabins one felt to be in communication with invisible depths crowded with human bodies in swimsuits, I had asked myself whether those depths, concealed from mortal eyes by a row of cabins that prevented anyone in the street from suspecting that they existed, were not the entry to arctic seas that began at that point, whether the poles were not comprised in them and whether that narrow space was not indeed the open water that surrounds the pole. This Venice

with no empathy for me in which I was going to be left alone, seemed to me no less isolated, no less unreal, and it was my distress that the strains of “O sole mio,” rising like a dirge for the Venice that I had known, seemed to be calling to witness. No doubt I ought to have ceased to listen to it if I wished to be able to rejoin my mother and take the train with her, I ought to have made up my mind without losing another second that I was leaving, but this is just what I was powerless to do; I remained motionless, incapable not merely of rising, but even of deciding that I would rise from my chair. My mind, doubtless in order not to have to consider the question of making a resolution, was entirely occupied in following the course of the successive lines of “O sole mio,” singing them mentally with the singer, in anticipating for each of them the burst of melody that would carry it aloft, in letting myself soar with it, and fall to earth again with it afterward. No doubt this trivial song that I had heard a hundred times did not interest me in the least. I could give no pleasure to anyone else, or to myself, by listening to it religiously like this to the end. In fact, none of the elements, familiar before-hand, of this popular ditty was capable of furnishing me with the resolution I needed; what was more, each of these phrases when it came and passed in its turn, became an obstacle in the way of my making that resolution effective, or rather it forced me to adopt the contrary resolution not to leave Venice, for it made me too late for the train. Thus was this occupation, devoid of any pleasure in itself, of listening to “O sole mio,” charged with a profound, almost despairing melancholy. I knew very well that in reality it was the resolution not to go that I was making by the mere act of remaining where I was without budging; but to say to myself: “I’m not going,” which in that direct form was impossible, became possible in this indirect form: “I’m going to listen to one more line of ‘O sole mio’”; but the practical significance of this figurative language did not escape me and, while I said to myself: “After all, I am only listening to another line,” I knew that the words meant: “I will remain by myself in Venice.” And it was perhaps this melancholy, like a sort of numbing cold, that constituted the desperate but fascinating charm of the song. Each note that the singer’s voice uttered with a force and ostentation that were almost muscular came and pierced my heart; when he had uttered his last flourish and the song seemed to be at an end, the singer had not had enough and repeated it from the top as though he needed to proclaim once again my solitude and despair. My mother must by now have reached the station. In a little while she

would be gone. I was gripped by the anguish that was caused me by the view of the canal that had become quite small now that the soul of Venice had escaped from it, of that commonplace Rialto, which was no longer the Rialto, by the song of despair that “O sole mio” had become, and which, declaimed thus before the unsubstantial palaces, reduced them to dust and ashes and completed the ruin of Venice; I looked on at the slow realization of my misery, built up artistically, without haste, note by note, by the singer as he stood beneath the astonished gaze of the sun arrested in its course beyond San Giorgio Maggiore, with the result that the fading light was to combine forever in my memory with the throb of my emotion and the bronze voice of the singer in a dubious, unalterable, and poignant alloy.

Thus I remained motionless with my willpower dissolved, with no apparent decision; doubtless at such moments our decision has already been made: our friends can often predict it themselves. But we ourselves, we are unable to do so, otherwise how much suffering would we be spared.

But from caverns darker than that from which flashes the comet that we can predict—thanks to the unimaginable defensive force of inveterate habit, thanks to the hidden reserves that by a sudden impulse habit hurls at the last moment into the fray—I was finally roused to action: I set off in hot haste and arrived, when the carriage doors were already shut, but in time to find my mother flushed with emotion, overcome by the effort to restrain her tears, for she thought that I was not coming. Then the train started and we saw Padua and Verona come to meet us, to speed us on our way, almost on to the platforms of their stations, and, when we had drawn away from them, return—they who were not traveling and were about to resume their normal life—one to its plain, the other to its hill.

The hours went by. My mother was in no hurry to read the two letters, which she had merely opened, and tried to prevent me from pulling out my wallet at once in order to take from it the letter that the hotel porter had given me. My mother was always afraid of my finding journeys too long, too tiring, and put off as long as possible, so as to keep me occupied during the final hours, the moment at which she would bring out the hard-boiled eggs, hand me the newspapers, untie the parcel of books that she had bought without telling me. I first watched my mother who was reading her letter with an air of astonishment, then raised her head, and her eyes seemed to come to rest upon a succession of distinct, incompatible memories, which she could not succeed in bringing together. Meanwhile I had recognized

Gilberte's hand on the envelope that I had just taken from my wallet. I opened it. Gilberte wrote to inform me that she was to marry Robert de Saint-Loup. She told me that she had sent me a telegram about it to Venice but had had no reply. I remembered that I had been told that the telegraphic service there was inefficient. I had never received her telegram. Perhaps she would refuse to believe this. All of a sudden, I felt in my brain a fact, which had installed itself there in the guise of a memory, leave its place that it surrendered to another fact. The telegram that I had received a few days earlier, and had supposed to be from Albertine, was from Gilberte. As the somewhat labored originality of Gilberte's handwriting consisted chiefly, when she wrote one line, in introducing into the line above the strokes of her *t*'s which appeared to be underlining the words, or the dots over her *i*'s which appeared to be punctuating the sentence above them, and on the other hand in interspersing the line below with the tails and flourishes of the words immediately above it, it was quite natural that the clerk who dispatched the telegram should have read the tail of an *s* or *y* in the line above as an *ine* attached to the word "Gilberte." The dot over the *i* of Gilberte had risen above the word to mark the end of the message. As for her capital *G*, it resembled a Gothic *A*. Add that, apart from this, two or three words had been misread, dovetailed into one another (some of them indeed had seemed to me incomprehensible), and this sufficed to explain the details of my error and was not even necessary. How many letters are actually read into a word by a careless person who knows what to expect, who sets out with the idea that the message is from a certain person? How many words into the sentence? We guess as we read, we create; everything starts from an initial error; those that follow (and not only in the reading of letters and telegrams, not only in reading as a whole), extraordinary as they may appear to a person who has not begun at the same starting point, are all quite natural. A large part of what we believe to be true (and this applies even to our final conclusions) with an obstinacy equaled only by our good faith, springs from an original mistake in our premises.

Notes

1. This is the church at Combray. See *Swann's Way*, 67–76.
2. A campanile is a usually freestanding bell tower.
3. In Venice, the Piazzetta is an open square that connects the Piazza, Saint Mark's Square, with the sea. The Piazza is enclosed on three sides by the arcades of the Procuratie, buildings that were constructed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries during the Italian Renaissance.

4. The campanile in Venice is topped by a figure of the Archangel Gabriel that functioned originally as a weather vane.

5. The rue de l'Oiseau is a street in Combray. See *Swann's Way*, 55.

6. San Giorgio Maggiore is a small island in the lagoon of Venice opposite Saint Mark's Square. The Benedictine church of San Giorgio Maggiore is an important landmark on the island. Designed by Andrea Palladio, it was built between 1566 and 1610.

7. Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1699–1779) was a painter who often took his subjects from everyday life such as kitchen utensils, fruit, and animals. In November 1895, Proust wrote to Pierre Mainguet, publisher of *La Revue hebdomadaire*, wondering whether his readers might be interested in a “little study of the philosophy of art . . . in which I try to show how great painters initiate us into a knowledge and love of the external world” by opening our eyes. Proust, *Correspondance*, 1: 446. Proust had chosen as his example Chardin, whose still lifes reveal the quiet beauty of the most common objects. Proust's essay was published posthumously. In his essay, Proust expressed for the first time one of his “laws” or truths: art always results from the vision unique to each artist and not from the beauty of the object depicted. He later attributed the ideas from the Chardin essay to Elstir. “The pleasure you get from his painting of a room where a woman sits sewing, a pantry, a kitchen, a sideboard, is the pleasure . . . that he got from the sight of a sideboard, a kitchen, a pantry, a room where a woman sat sewing . . . You have already experienced it subconsciously, this pleasure one gets from the sight of everyday scenes and inanimate objects, otherwise it would not have risen in your heart when Chardin summoned it in his ringing commanding accents. Your consciousness was too sluggish to reach down to it. It had to wait for Chardin to come and lay hold of it and hoist it to the level of your conscious mind.” *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature, 1896–1919*, translated by Sylvia Townsend Warner, with an introduction by Terence Kilmartin (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1984), 325.

8. Paolo Veronese (1528–88) was a Venetian painter who delighted in the splendor and pageantry of sixteenth-century Venice. He depicted the figures in his biblical scenes in the costumes of his own day and placed them in lavish, tumultuous settings, such as those seen in the *Marriage Feast at Cana*, the *Feast of the House of Simon*, and *Supper at Emmaus*. By evoking the paintings of Chardin, Proust is contrasting the simplicity of his works with the splendor of Venice as seen in the paintings by Veronese.

9. Maxime Dethomas (1867–1929) was a designer and set decorator who created costumes and sets for the Opéra and the Comédie-Française. Proust is thinking here of Dethomas's 1906 illustrations for *Esquisses vénitiennes* by Henri de Régnier. Dethomas also produced illustrations for an article by Proust, *À Venise*, which appeared in the *Feuilles d'art* on December 5, 1919, pp. 1–12.

10. Aubervilliers is a “village in the département of Seine, which, from the Middle Ages on, was a frequent place of pilgrimage the second Tuesday in May in honor of Notre-Dame-des-Vertus. Baedeker's *Handbook for Paris*, 1894, describes it as an uninteresting village connected with Paris by a tramway.” *A Proust Dictionary*, by Maxine Arnold Vogely (Troy, N.Y.: Whitson, 1981), 47.

11. The Italian plural of “campo” is in Venice a more common designation for a square than “piazza.”

12. Plural of “rio,” Italian for canal.

13. Italian for narrow streets.

14. Herod (73–4 B.C.) was King of Judea. Under his rule, the Jews had embellished the Temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem and also the one in Palestine that later became Saint-Jean-d'Acre. The Venetian doge, Domenico Michele, fought at Jerusalem and, in 1126, took back to Venice spoils that included the two columns that now stand on the Piazzetta. One column bears the statue of Saint Theodore, the other, the Lion of Saint Mark.

15. Italian for foreigners.

16. Charles Frederick Worth (1825–95) was an English fashion designer who founded the House of Worth. He is considered by many historians of fashion to be the father of haute couture. His

dresses attracted European royalty and Worth became the couturier of Empress Eugénie during the Second Empire.

[17.](#) The Salviati family were important glass makers and mosaicists in Venice.

[18.](#) *Corriere della Sera* (the Evening courier) is a daily newspaper published in Milan from 1876. The *Gazzetta del Popolo* (the People's gazette) was published in Turin beginning in 1848. It ceased publication in December 1983.

[19.](#) Maurice Paléologue (1859–1944) served as ambassador from France to Sofia in 1907 and to Moscow during World War I.

[20.](#) Henri Lozé (1850–1915) was ambassador to Vienna from 1893 to 1897.

[21.](#) Bonnétable is a town and a forest in the département of Sarthe. It has a fine fifteenth-century château that belonged to the Duc de Doudeauville, a member of the La Rochefoucauld family.

[22.](#) She is the daughter of Cyrus de Bouillon and granddaughter of Florimond de Guise. (See *The Guermantes Way*, 584, where the Duc de Guermantes mistakenly identifies her as Florimond's daughter.) This makes the fictional Madame de Villeparisis a member of the distinguished aristocratic family La Tour d'Auvergne.

[23.](#) Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47) was a German composer known for his choral and orchestral works. César Franck (1822–90) was a Belgian composer and naturalized French citizen. He wrote Sonata in A major for Violin and Piano (1886), one of the models for the Vinteuil sonata in *Swann's Way*, as Proust himself revealed in a letter to Jacques Lacretelle. See Proust, *Selected Letters*, 4: 39.

[24.](#) Latin for witness.

[25.](#) This is a reference to Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), a Florentine historian, whose book *The Prince* sets out subtle, realistic, but often unethical principles of government, marked by cunning, duplicity, or bad faith.

[26.](#) Giovanni Giolitti (1842–1928) was an Italian statesman who served as president of the Council five times between 1892 and 1921.

[27.](#) This street, in the fashionable sixteenth arrondissement, runs from the place des États-Unis to the avenue Kléber.

[28.](#) Camille Barrère (1851–1940) was a diplomat who served as ambassador to Rome from 1897 to 1924. He worked to improve Franco-Italian relations and obtained a neutrality agreement. In 1915, he was influential in Italy's entering World War I on the side of the Allies.

[29.](#) Emilio, Marquis Visconti-Venosta (1829–1914) was Italian minister of foreign affairs a number of times between 1863 and 1901. He worked for the rapprochement between France and Italy and had frequent contacts with Camille Barrère.

[30.](#) German for “under the linden trees,” the name of a vast promenade in Berlin that begins at the Brandenburg Gate. The promenade is the German equivalent of Paris's Champs-Élysées. It was the site of informal meetings as opposed to official ones.

[31.](#) A grammatical mood in Greek and other languages indicating a wish or desire.

[32.](#) Compiègne is a town in the département of Oise where there is a château, built in large part under Louis XV; it was enlarged and redecorated by Napoléon I. Napoléon's nephew, Napoléon III, used the château as his court and held brilliant parties there. The Musée de Compiègne houses the famous painting by Franz Winterhalter of the Empress Eugénie and her ladies-in-waiting.

[33.](#) Achille Bazaine (1811–88), Maréchal de France, was made commander in chief in 1870 by Napoléon III. During the Franco-Prussian War, he surrendered at Metz on October 27, 1870. His death sentence was later reduced to life imprisonment. He was then exiled to Spain.

[34.](#) In Venice, the Piombi are cells, covered with slabs of steel, under the roof of the Doge's Palace, in which political prisoners were incarcerated.

[35.](#) Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877) was a statesman and historian who fought against the politics of Napoléon III. He was the first Président de la République, from 1871–73.

[36.](#) The Raffineries Say were important sugar refineries in which Proust himself owned shares. See Proust, *Selected Letters*, 4: 274.

37. Proust earlier used carnation pink to describe the color of Albertine's cheeks and then the complexion of the seaside girls. The first meaning of carnation in English and in French is "the variable color of human flesh." See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 542, 575.

38. Eric Karpeles suggests Titian's *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* that the artist painted in 1536. The picture belongs to Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. See Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust: A Visual Companion to In Search of Lost Time* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), 271.

39. Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni is a hospice built in Venice in 1501 by the Dalmatian brotherhood of Saint George and Saint Tryphonius, whose aim was to protect the poor and needy Slavs in Venice. Carpaccio was commissioned to paint the *Stories of the Patron Saints of the Scuola*, Saint Jerome, Saint Tryphon, and Saint George, later joined by Saint Matthew when the Scuola received a relic of that saint in 1502. Proust knew the paintings from his translations of *The Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lilies* by Ruskin and from his 1900 trip to Venice.

40. There is no stylized eagle in any of the Carpaccio frescoes. However, a symbolic eagle is often associated with the apostles. For example, John the Apostle, as the presumed author of the fourth Gospel, is often depicted with an eagle to symbolize the height to which he rose in the first chapter of his gospel.

41. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 172.

42. This is a reference to act 2, scene 5 of Racine's play *Phèdre*. There, however, the lines are spoken by Phèdre to compare the youthful Hippolyte with his father, Thésée.

43. This is another instance of the author's identifying the Narrator with himself. Proust published articles and translations of work by John Ruskin (1819–1900). During his trip to Venice in 1900, Proust was reading Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* and *Saint Mark's Rest* while working on articles about Ruskin, as well as his translation of Ruskin's *The Bible of Amiens*, which was published in 1904. Proust published his translation of *Sesame and Lilies* in 1906. See William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 295–97.

44. The mosaics date from the fourteenth century and depict mostly scenes from the life of Saint John the Baptist.

45. See the description of the tombstones in *Swann's Way*, 67.

46. In Carpaccio's *Martrydom of the Pilgrims and the Burial of St. Ursula*, we see such a woman kneeling at the foot of the steps as she watches the funeral procession. Proust evokes the kneeling woman in memory of his mother who, in Venice, encouraged and aided him during his work on Ruskin. In a letter, Proust speaks of his familiarity with Carpaccio's works and particularly of the nine paintings devoted to *The Life of Saint Ursula*: "Carpaccio is a painter I know very well; I spent whole days in San Giorgio degli Schiavoni and in front of St Ursula. . . . But hardly a day goes by without my looking at reproductions of Carpaccio." Proust, *Selected Letters*, 3: 337–38.

47. Carpaccio painted *The Patriarch of Grado Exorcising a Demoniac* in 1495. The Narrator purchased for Albertine some of Fortuny's dressing gowns that were inspired by garments depicted in Carpaccio's paintings. His works are important for the documentary evidence that they provide of Venetian life in the fifteenth century.

48. Whistler traveled to Venice in 1879 to create a series of twelve etchings commissioned by the Fine Art Society in London. Fascinated by the city, he stayed for fourteen months instead of the allotted three and completed approximately fifty etchings.

49. The Rialto Bridge crosses over the narrowest point of the Grand Canal in the heart of Venice. Built in the closing years of the sixteenth century, it is the oldest bridge across the canal and is renowned as an architectural and engineering achievement of the Renaissance. The first bridge was constructed in 1180 and, as Carpaccio's *Patriarch of Grado Exorcising a Demoniac* shows, it was a wooden bridge.

50. "Ponte vecchio" is Italian for old bridge and is the name of a bridge built in 1355 across the Arno River in Florence. It is unclear contextually what bridge Proust is referring to here.

[51.](#) *La Légende de Joseph* was a ballet created by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Paris on May 14, 1914. Richard Strauss wrote the music to the libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Harry Graf Kessler. José-Maria Sert designed the set and costumes. Since the ballet was inspired by great Renaissance painters, Sert presented the biblical legend as it was envisioned by those painters.

[52.](#) The Compagnia della Calza was an association of fifteenth-century Venetian noblemen who organized festivities of all kinds, each with a distinguishing emblem embroidered in gold and pearls and conspicuously displayed on the sleeve or back of the cloak.

[53.](#) Proust uses this phrase he found in the last letter he received from Agostinelli. See Proust, *Selected Letters* 3: 256–59, and notes 1, 2.

[54.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 91–92, 138–40, 374, 443.

[55.](#) Padua is a city in northern Italy and the site of the Arena Chapel, famous for Giotto's frescoes.

[56.](#) The site is known as the Arena because the chapel to the Virgin was built near the ruins of a Roman amphitheater.

[57.](#) There are flying angels in seven of the thirty-eight scenes of the lives of the Virgin and Christ. Karpeles chose as an example *The Lamentation*. See Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust*, 281.

[58.](#) The monochrome figures of the Vices and Virtues are below the colored frescoes of the life of the Virgin and of Christ.

[59.](#) Roland Garros (1888–1918) was a pioneer aviator and, in 1913, became the first pilot to fly over the Mediterranean Sea. He died in aerial combat on October 5, barely a month before the end of World War I. His name is best known today as an eponym for the Paris tennis stadium where the French Open is contested.

[60.](#) Proust earlier used virtually the same description when the Narrator compares poor neighborhoods of Paris to those of Venice. See *The Guermantes Way*, 631.

[61.](#) Delft and Haarlem are cities in the Netherlands.

[62.](#) “O sole mio” (O, my sun) is a Neapolitan song composed in 1898 by Eduardo di Capua and Alfredo Mazzucchi with lyrics by Giovanni Capurro.

[63.](#) Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851) was an English painter whose work was championed by Ruskin. Turner's paintings of Venice include depictions of the approach to Venice, the Bridge of Sighs, the Campo Santo, the Salute, the Grand Canal, and Saint Mark's square. For Turner's vision of *The Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute*, see Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust*, 283.

[64.](#) This is the location of the shipyards in Venice from which the great Venetian fleets set sail. Located in the eastern quarter of the city, the basin is surrounded by buildings with battlemented walls and towers in a circuit of nearly two miles. At the entrance is a great Renaissance gateway dating from 1460. Vogely, *A Proust Dictionary*, 38.

[65.](#) The Deligny Bathhouse was a large barge moored to the banks of the Seine near the place de la Concorde. The establishment contained a swimming pool and a restaurant. Proust's father, Dr. Adrien Proust, professor of hygiene at the University of Paris, recommended the baths to his wife, who, seeking relief for health problems, regularly bathed in the cold water. When he was very young, Proust accompanied her on occasion. For Proust's fear of being separated from his mother at the Deligny Bathhouse, see Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life*, 35–36.

Chapter 4

A New Aspect of Robert de Saint-Loup

“Oh, it is unheard-of,” said my mother. “Listen, at my age, one has ceased to be astonished at anything, but I assure you that there could be nothing more unexpected than the news brought by this letter.”

“Listen, first, to me,” I replied, “I don’t know what it is, but however astonishing it may be, it cannot be quite so astonishing as what I have learned from this one. It’s a marriage. Robert de Saint-Loup is going to marry Gilberte Swann.”

“Ah!” said my mother, “then that must be what’s in the other letter, which I have not yet opened, for I recognized your friend’s hand.” And my mother smiled at me with that faint trace of emotion that, ever since she had lost her own mother, she felt at every event however insignificant, that concerned human creatures who were capable of grief, of recollection, and who themselves also mourned their dead. And so my mother smiled at me and spoke to me in a gentle voice, as though she had been afraid, were she to treat this marriage lightly, of belittling the melancholy feelings that it might arouse in Swann’s widow and daughter, in Robert’s mother who had resigned herself to parting from her son, all of whom my mother, in her kindness of heart, in her gratitude for their kindness to me, endowed with her own faculty of filial, conjugal, and maternal emotion.

“Was I right in telling you that you would find nothing more astonishing?” I asked her.

“On the contrary!” she replied in a gentle tone, “I’m the one who has the most extraordinary news, I will not say ‘the greatest, the smallest,’¹ for that quotation from Sévigné that everyone makes who knows nothing else that she ever wrote used to sicken your grandmother as much as ‘what a pretty thing is haymaking.’ We don’t deign to collect such stereotyped Sévigné. This letter is to announce the marriage of the Cambremer boy.”

“Oh!” I remarked with indifference, “to whom? But in any case the personality of the bridegroom robs this marriage of any sensational element.”

“Unless the bride’s personality supplies it.”

“And who is the bride in question?”

“Ah, if I tell you straight away, that will spoil the fun; see if you can guess,” said my mother who, seeing that we had not yet reached Turin, wished to keep something in reserve for me as meat and drink for the rest of the journey.

“But how do you expect me to know? Is it anyone brilliant? If Legrandin and his sister are satisfied, we may be sure that it is a brilliant marriage.”

“As for Legrandin, I cannot say, but the person who informs me of the marriage says that Mme de Cambremer is delighted. I don’t know whether you will call it a brilliant marriage. To my mind, it suggests the days when kings used to marry shepherdesses, though in this case the shepherdess is even humbler than a shepherdess, charming as she is. It would have astonished your grandmother but would not have displeased her.”

“But who in the world is this bride?”

“It is Mlle d’Oloron.”

“That sounds to me tremendous and not in the least shepherdessy, but I don’t quite gather who she can be. It is a title that used to be in the Guermantes family.”

“Precisely, and M. de Charlus conferred it, when he adopted her, upon Jupien’s niece.”

“Jupien’s niece! It isn’t possible!”

“It is the reward of virtue. It is a marriage from the last chapter of one of Mme Sand’s novels,” said my mother. “It is the reward of vice, it is a marriage from the end of a Balzac novel,” thought I.

“After all,” I said to my mother, “when you come to think of it, it is quite natural. Here are the Cambremers established in that Guermantes clan in which they never hoped to pitch their tent; what is more, the girl, adopted by M. de Charlus, will have plenty of money, which was indispensable now that the Cambremers have lost theirs; and after all she is the adopted daughter, and, in the Cambremers’ eyes, probably the real daughter—the natural daughter—of a person whom they regard as a Prince of the Blood Royal. A bastard of a semiroyal house has always been regarded as a flattering alliance by the nobility of France and other countries. Indeed, without going so far back, to the Lucinges,² only the other day, not more than six months ago, you remember, the marriage of Robert’s friend and that girl whose only social qualification was that she was supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be the natural daughter of a sovereign prince.”

My mother, without abandoning the caste system of Combray, which meant that my grandmother ought to have been scandalized by such a marriage, being anxious above all to echo her mother's judgment, added: "Anyhow, the girl is worth her weight in gold, and your dear grandmother would not have had to draw upon her immense goodness, her unbounded indulgence, to keep her from condemning young Cambremer's choice. Do you remember how distinguished she thought the girl was, years ago, one day when she went into the shop to have a stitch put in her skirt? She was only a child then. And now, even if she has rather run to seed, and become an old maid, she is a different woman, a thousand times more perfect. But your grandmother saw all that at a glance. She found the little niece of a tailor more 'noble' than the Duc de Guermantes."³

But even more necessary than to extol my grandmother was it for my mother to decide that it was "better" for her that she had not lived to see the day. This was the supreme triumph of her daughterly love, as though she were sparing my grandmother a final grief. "And yet, can you imagine for a moment," my mother said to me, "what old father Swann—not that you ever knew him, of course—would have felt if he could have known that he would one day have a great-grandchild in whose veins the blood of mother Moser who used to say: 'Ponchour Mezieurs' would mingle with the blood of the Duc de Guise!"

"But you know, Mamma, it's even more surprising than that. Because the Swanns were very respectable people, and, given the social position of their son, his daughter, if he himself had made a decent marriage, might have married very well indeed. But all her chances were ruined by his marrying a cocotte."

"Oh, a cocotte, you know, people were perhaps rather malicious, I never quite believed it all."

"Yes, a cocotte, indeed, I will tell you some rather startling family revelations one of these days."

Lost in reverie, my mother said: "The daughter of a woman whom your father would never allow me to greet marrying the nephew of Mme de Villeparisis, on whom your father wouldn't allow me to call at first because he thought her too grand for us!" Then: "The son of Mme de Cambremer, to whom Legrandin was so afraid of having to give us a letter of introduction because he didn't think us chic enough,⁴ marrying the niece of a man who would never dare to come to our apartment except by the service stairs! . . .

All the same, your poor grandmother was right—you remember—when she said that the high aristocracy could do things that would shock the middle classes and that Queen Marie-Amélie was spoiled for her by the overtures that she made to the Prince de Condé's mistress to persuade him to leave his fortune to the Duc d'Aumale.⁵ You remember too, it shocked her that for centuries past daughters of the House of Gramont who were veritable saints had borne the name Corisande in memory of Henri IV's liaison with one of their ancestresses.⁶ These are things that may occur also, perhaps, among the middle classes, but they conceal them better. Can't you imagine how it would have amused your poor grandmother!" said Mamma sadly, for the joys of which it grieved us to think that my grandmother was deprived were the simplest joys of life, a bit of news, a play, something more trifling still, a piece of mimicry, which would have amused her. "Can't you imagine her astonishment! I am sure, however, that your grandmother would have been shocked by these marriages, that they would have grieved her; I feel that it is better that she never knew about them," my mother went on, for, when confronted with any event, she liked to think that my grandmother would have received a distinctive impression of it which would have been due to the marvelous singularity of her nature and have been extraordinarily important. Did anything sad or painful occur, which could not have been foreseen in the past, the disgrace or ruin of one of our old friends, some public calamity, an epidemic, a war, a revolution, my mother would say to herself that perhaps it was better that grandmother had known nothing about it, that it would have distressed her too keenly, that perhaps she would not have been able to endure it. And when it was a question of something shocking like these two marriages, my mother, by an impulse directly opposite to that of the malicious people who like to imagine that others whom they do not like have suffered more than is generally supposed, would not, in her affection for my grandmother, allow that anything sad or depressing could ever have happened to her. She always imagined my grandmother as raised above the assaults even of any evil that ought not to have occurred, and told herself that my grandmother's death had perhaps been a blessing on the whole, inasmuch as it had shut off the too ugly spectacle of the present day from that noble nature that could never have become resigned to it. For optimism is the philosophy of the past. The events that have occurred being, among all those that were possible, the only ones that we have known, the harm that they have caused seems to us

inevitable, and, for the slight amount of good that they could not help bringing with them, it is to them that we give the credit, imagining that without them it would not have occurred. She sought at the same time to form a more accurate idea of what my grandmother would have felt when she learned these tidings, and to believe that it was impossible for our minds, less exalted than hers, to form any such idea. "Can't you imagine," my mother said to me first of all, "how astonished your poor grandmother would have been!" And I felt that my mother was pained by her inability to tell her the news, regretted that my grandmother could never know it, and felt it to be somehow unjust that the course of life should bring to light facts that my grandmother would never have believed, rendering thus retrospectively the knowledge that my grandmother had taken with her of people and society false, and incomplete, the marriage of the Jupien girl and Legrandin's nephew being calculated to modify my grandmother's general ideas of life, no less than the news—had my mother been able to convey it to her—that people had succeeded in solving the problems, which my grandmother had regarded as insoluble, of aerial navigation and wireless telegraphy. But as we will see, this desire that my grandmother should share in the benefits of our modern science was soon to appear too selfish to my mother. What I was to learn later on—for I had been unable to keep in touch with all this affair from Venice—was that Mlle de Forcheville's hand had been sought by the Duc de Châtellerault and by the Prince de Silistrie, while Saint-Loup was seeking to marry Mlle d'Entragues, the Duc de Luxembourg's daughter. This is what had occurred. Mlle de Forcheville possessing a hundred million francs, Mme de Marsantes had decided that she would be an excellent match for her son. She made the mistake of saying that the girl was charming, that she herself had not the slightest idea whether she was rich or poor, that she did not wish to know, but that even without a dowry it would be a piece of good luck for the most exacting of young men to find such a wife. This was going rather too far for a woman who was tempted only by the hundred millions, which made her shut her eyes to everything else. At once it was understood that she was thinking of the girl for her own son. The Princesse de Silistrie went around protesting loudly, expatiating on the social grandeur of Saint-Loup, and proclaiming that if he should marry the daughter of Odette and a Jew then it was the end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. Mme de Marsantes, sure of herself as she was, dared not advance further and retreated before the protests of the

Princesse de Silistrie, who immediately made a proposal on behalf of her own son. She had protested only in order to keep Gilberte for herself. Meanwhile Mme de Marsantes, refusing to own herself defeated, had turned at once to Mlle d'Enragues, the Duc de Luxembourg's daughter. Having no more than twenty million, she suited her purpose less, but Mme de Marsantes told everyone that a Saint-Loup could not marry a Mlle Swann (there was no longer any mention of Forcheville). Sometime later, somebody having thoughtlessly observed that the Duc de Châtellerauld was thinking of marrying Mlle d'Enragues, Mme de Marsantes, who was the most punctilious woman in the world, mounted her high horse, changed her tactics, returned to Gilberte, made a formal offer of marriage on Saint-Loup's behalf, and the engagement was immediately announced.

This engagement provoked keen comment in the most different spheres. Several of my mother's friends who had met Saint-Loup in our house came to her "day," and inquired whether the bridegroom was indeed the same person as my friend. Certain people went so far as to maintain, with regard to the other marriage, that it had nothing to do with the Legrandin Cambremers. They had this on good authority, for the marquise, *née* Legrandin, had denied it on the very eve of the day on which the engagement was announced. I, for my part, asked myself why M. de Charlus on the one hand, Saint-Loup on the other, each of whom had had occasion to write to me quite recently, had suggested various friendly projects and proposed travel plans, the realization of which must inevitably have clashed with the wedding ceremonies, and had said nothing whatever to me about these. I came to the conclusion, forgetting the secrecy that people always maintain until the last moment in affairs of this sort, that I was less their friend than I had supposed, a conclusion that, so far as Saint-Loup was concerned, distressed me. Though why, when I had already remarked that the affability, the "one-man-to-another" attitude of the aristocracy was all a sham, should I be surprised to find myself its victim? In the establishment for women—where men were now to be procured in increasing numbers—in which M. de Charlus had surprised Morel,⁷ and in which the "assistant matron,"⁸ a great reader of *Le Gaulois*, used to discuss the social gossip with her clients, this lady, while conversing with a stout gentleman who used to come to her to drink bottle after bottle of champagne with young men, because, being already very stout, he wished to become obese enough to be certain of not being "called up," should there

ever be a war, declared: "It seems, young Saint-Loup is 'one of those' and young Cambremer too. Poor wives! In any case, if you know the bridegrooms, you must send them to us; they will find everything they want here, and there's plenty of money to be made out of them." Whereupon the stout gentleman, albeit he was himself "one of those," replied, being something of a snob, that he often met Cambremer and Saint-Loup at his cousins' the Ardonvillers, and that they were great womanizers, and quite the opposite of "all that." "Ah!" the assistant matron concluded in a skeptical tone, but without any proof of the assertion, and convinced that in our century the perversity of morals was rivaled only by the absurd exaggeration of slanderous tittle-tattle. Certain people whom I no longer saw wrote to me and asked me "what I thought" of these two marriages, precisely as though they had been opening an inquiry into the height of women's hats in the theater or the psychological novel. I did not have the heart to answer these letters. Of these two marriages, I thought nothing at all, but I did feel an immense sadness, as when two parts of our past existence, which have been anchored near to us, and upon which we have perhaps been basing idly from day to day an unacknowledged hope, remove themselves finally, with a joyous flapping of pennants, for unknown destinations, like two vessels on the high seas. As for the prospective bridegrooms themselves, they regarded their own marriages from a point of view that was quite natural, since it was a question not of other people but of themselves. They had never tired of mocking at such "grand marriages" founded upon some secret taint. And even the Cambremer family, so ancient in its lineage and so modest in its pretensions, would have been the first to forget Jupien and to remember only the unimaginable grandeur of the House of Oloron, had not an exception occurred in the person who ought to have been most gratified by this marriage, the Marquise de Cambremer-Legrandin. For, being of a malicious nature, she reckoned the pleasure of humiliating her family above that of glorifying herself. And so, having no affection for her son, and having quickly taken a dislike to her future daughter-in-law, she declared that it was calamity for a Cambremer to marry a person who had sprung from heaven knew where and had such crooked teeth. As for young Cambremer, who had already shown a certain tendency to frequent the society of men of letters such as Bergotte and even Bloch, we may well imagine that so brilliant an alliance did not have the effect of making him more of a snob than before, but that, feeling himself to

have become the successor of the Ducs d'Oléron—"sovereign princes" as the newspapers said—he was sufficiently persuaded of his own grandeur to be able to mix with anyone at all. And he deserted the minor nobility for the intelligent bourgeoisie on the days when he did not devote himself to royalty. The notices in the newspapers, especially when they referred to Saint-Loup, invested my friend, whose royal ancestors were enumerated, in a new grandeur, which however could only sadden me—as though he had become someone else, the descendant of Robert le Fort,⁹ rather than the friend who, only a little while since, had taken the folding seat in the carriage in order that I might be more comfortable in the back; the fact that I had had no previous suspicion of his marriage with Gilberte, the prospect of which had been revealed to me suddenly in a letter, so different from anything that I could have expected of either him or her the day before, as unexpected as a chemical precipitate, and the fact that he had not let me know pained me, whereas I ought to have reflected that he had had a great deal to do, and that moreover in the fashionable world marriages are often arranged like this all of a sudden, generally as a substitute for a different combination that has come to grief. And the feeling of sadness, as depressing as moving house, as bitter as jealousy, that these marriages caused me by the accident of their sudden impact was so profound, that later on people used to remind me of it, paying absurd compliments to my perspicacity, as having been just the opposite of what it was at the time, a twofold, nay a threefold and even fourfold presentiment.

The people in society who had taken no notice of Gilberte said to me with an air of serious interest: "Ah! She's the one who is marrying the Marquis de Saint-Loup" and studied her with the attentive gaze of people who do not merely relish all the social gossip of Paris but are eager to learn and believe in the profundity of their observation. Those who on the other hand had known only Gilberte gazed at Saint-Loup with the closest attention and asked me (these were often people who barely knew me) to introduce them and returned from their presentation to the bridegroom radiant with the joys of the festivity, saying to me: "He is very nice looking." Gilberte was convinced that the name "Marquis de Saint-Loup" was a thousand times grander than "Duc d'Orléans," but since she was very much of her own witty generation (rather egalitarian), she did not want to appear less witty than others, and delighted in saying *mater semita*, to

which she added in order to appear even wittier, “In my case, however, it’s my *pater*.”¹⁰

“It appears that it is the Princesse de Parme who arranged young Cambremer’s marriage,” Mamma said to me. And this was true. The princess had known for a long time, from her charitable works, on the one hand Legrandin whom she regarded as a distinguished man, on the other hand Mme de Cambremer who changed the subject whenever the princess asked her whether she was Legrandin’s sister. The princess knew how keenly Mme de Cambremer regretted having remained on the threshold of aristocratic high society, where no one invited her in. When the Princesse de Parme, who had undertaken to find a husband for Mlle d’Oloron, asked M. de Charlus whether he had ever heard of an amiable, well-educated man who called himself Legrandin de Méséglise (thus it was that M. Legrandin now styled himself), the baron first of all replied in the negative, then suddenly he remembered a man whose acquaintance he had made in the train, one night, and who had given him his card. He smiled a vague smile. “It is perhaps the same person,” he said to himself. When he discovered that the prospective bridegroom was the son of Legrandin’s sister, he said: “Why, that would be really extraordinary! If he takes after his uncle, after all, that would not alarm me, I have always said that they make the best husbands.” “Who are *they*?” inquired the princess. “Oh, Madame, I could explain it all to you if we met more often. With you one can talk freely. Your Highness is so intelligent,” said Charlus, seized by a desire to confide in someone which, however, went no further. The name Cambremer appealed to him, although he did not like the boy’s parents, but he knew that it was one of the four Baronies of Brittany and everything that he could possibly hope for his adopted daughter; it was an old and respected name, with solid connections in its native province. A prince would have been out of the question and, moreover, not altogether desirable. This was the very thing. The princess then invited Legrandin to call. Physically he had changed considerably, of late, and distinctly to his advantage. Like those women who deliberately sacrifice their faces to the slimness of their figures and never stir from Marienbad,¹¹ Legrandin had acquired the free and easy air of a cavalry officer. In proportion as M. de Charlus had grown heavier and slowed down, Legrandin had become slimmer and moved more rapidly, the contrary effect of an identical cause. This velocity of movement had its psychological reasons as well. He was in the habit of frequenting certain

low haunts where he did not wish to be seen going in or coming out: he would hurl himself into them. When the Princesse de Parme spoke to him of the Guermantes, of Saint-Loup, he declared that he had known them all his life, making a sort of *mélange* of the fact of his having always known *by name* the proprietors of Guermantes and that of his having met *in person*, at my aunt's house, Swann, the father of the future Mme de Saint-Loup, Swann upon whose wife and daughter Legrandin, at Combray, had always refused to call. "Indeed, I traveled quite recently with the brother of the Duc de Guermantes, M. de Charlus. He began the conversation spontaneously, which is always a good sign, for it proves that a man is neither a tongue-tied lout nor a pretentious snob. Oh, I know all the things that people say about him. But I never pay any attention to gossip of that sort. Besides, the private life of other people does not concern me. He gave me the impression of a sensitive nature, and a cultivated mind." Then the Princesse de Parme spoke of Mlle d'Oloron. In the Guermantes circle people were moved by the nobility of heart of M. de Charlus who, generous as he had always been, was securing the future happiness of a penniless but charming girl. And the Duc de Guermantes, who suffered from his brother's reputation, let it be understood that, fine as this conduct was, it was wholly natural. "I don't know if I make myself clear, everything in the affair is natural," he said, in an effort to be clever. But his object was to indicate that the girl was a daughter of his brother whom the latter was acknowledging. This accounted at the same time for Jupien. The Princesse de Parme hinted at this version of the story to show Legrandin that after all young Cambremer would be marrying something in the nature of Mlle de Nantes,¹² one of those bastards of Louis XIV who were not scorned either by the Duc d'Orléans or by the Prince de Conti.

These two marriages that I had already discussed with my mother in the train that brought us back to Paris had quite remarkable effects upon several of the characters who have figured in the course of this narrative. First of all upon Legrandin; needless to say, he swept like a hurricane into M. de Charlus's hôtel for all the world as though he were entering a house of ill-fame where he must on no account be seen, and also, at the same time, to display his bravura and to conceal his age—for our habits accompany us even into places where they are no longer of any use to us—and scarcely anybody observed that when M. de Charlus greeted him he did so with a smile that was hard to detect, harder still to interpret; this smile was similar

in appearance—and in its essentials diametrically opposite—to the smile that two men, who are in the habit of meeting in good society, exchange if they happen to meet in what they regard as disreputable surroundings (such as the Élysée, where Général de Froberville, whenever in days past he met Swann there, would assume, on catching sight of him, an expression of ironical and mysterious complicity appropriate between two habitués of the drawing room of the Princesse des Laumes who were compromising themselves by visiting M. Grévy). But what was rather remarkable was the real improvement in Legrandin's nature. He had been cultivating discreetly for a long time—ever since the days when I used to go as a child to spend my holidays at Combray—relations with the aristocracy, productive at the most of an isolated invitation to a sterile house party. All of a sudden, his nephew's marriage having intervened to join up these scattered fragments, Legrandin stepped into a social position to which, retroactively, his former relations with people who had known him only as a private person but had known him well, gave a sort of solidity. Ladies to whom people offered to introduce him informed them that for the past twenty years he had stayed with them in the country for two weeks annually, and that it was he who had given them the beautiful old barometer in the small drawing room. He had also happened to be photographed in "groups" that included dukes who were now related to him. But as soon as he had acquired this social position, he ceased to take advantage of it. This was not merely because, now that people knew him to be received everywhere, he no longer derived any pleasure from being invited; it was because, of the two vices that had long struggled for the mastery of him, the less natural, snobbishness, yielded to another that was less artificial, since it did at least show a sort of return, albeit circuitous, toward nature. No doubt the two are not incompatible, and a nocturnal tour of exploration of a neighborhood may be made immediately after leaving a duchess's party. But the dampening effect of age made Legrandin reluctant to accumulate such an abundance of pleasures, to stir out of doors except with a definite purpose and had also the effect that the pleasures of nature became more or less platonic, consisting chiefly in friendships, in time-consuming conversations, and made him spend almost all his own among the people, so that he had little left for social life. Mme de Cambremer herself became almost indifferent to the friendly overtures of the Duchesse de Guermantes. The latter, obliged to call upon the marquise, had noticed, as happens whenever we come to see

more of our fellow creatures, that is to say combinations of good qualities that we end by discovering with defects to which we finally grow accustomed, that Mme de Cambremer was a woman endowed with an innate intelligence and an acquired culture of which for my part I thought but little, but which appeared remarkable to the duchess. And so she often came, late in the afternoon, to see Mme de Cambremer and paid her long visits. But the marvelous charm that her hostess imagined as existing in the Duchesse de Guermantes vanished as soon as she saw that the other sought her company, and she received her rather out of politeness than pleasure. A more striking change was manifest in Gilberte, a change at once symmetrical with and different from the one that had occurred in Swann after his marriage. It is true that during the first few months Gilberte had been glad to open her doors to the most select company. It was doubtless only because of the inheritance that she invited the intimate friends to whom her mother was attached, but on certain days only when there was no one but themselves, secluded apart from the fashionable people, as though the contact of Mme Bontemps or Mme Cottard with the Princesse de Guermantes or the Princesse de Parme might, like that of two unstable powders, have produced irreparable catastrophes. Nevertheless the Bontemps, the Cottards, and such, although disappointed to be dining among themselves, were proud of being able to say: "We were dining with the Marquise de Saint-Loup," all the more so as she ventured at times so far as to invite, with them, Mme de Marsantes, who was emphatically the "great lady" with a fan of tortoiseshell and ostrich feathers, this again in the interests of the inheritance. She merely took care to pay from time to time a tribute to the discreet people whom one never sees except when they are invited, fair warning after which she could bestow upon the Cottard-Bontemps sort, her most gracious and lofty greeting. Perhaps because of my "Balbec girlfriend" by whose aunt I liked to be seen in these surroundings, I would have preferred to be included in those parties. But Gilberte, in whose eyes I was now principally a friend of her husband and of the Guermantes' (and who—perhaps even in the Combray days, when my parents did not call upon her mother—had, at the age when we do not merely add this or that to the value of things but classify them according to their species, endowed me with the prestige that we never afterward lose), regarded these evenings as unworthy of me, and when I was leaving would say to me: "It has been delightful to see you, but come again the day after tomorrow, you

will find my Aunt Guermantes, and Mme de Poix; today I just had a few of Mamma's friends, to please Mamma." But this state of things lasted for a few months only, and very soon everything was totally altered. Was this because Gilberte's social life was fated to exhibit the same contrasts as Swann's? However that may be, Gilberte had been only for a short time Marquise de Saint-Loup (in the process of becoming, as we will see, Duchesse de Guermantes)¹³ when, having attained to the most brilliant and most difficult position to attain, she decided that the name Guermantes was now embodied in her like a glowing enamel and that, whomever she frequented, from now onward she would remain for all the world Marquise de Saint-Loup, wherein she was mistaken, for the value of a title of nobility, like that of shares in a company, rises with demand and falls when it is offered on the market. Everything that seems to us imperishable tends to destruction; a position in society, like anything else, is not created once and for all, but, just as much as the power of an empire, reconstructs itself at every moment by a sort of perpetual process of creation, which explains the apparent anomalies in social or political history in the course of half a century. The creation of the world did not occur at the beginning of time, it occurs every day. The Marquise de Saint-Loup said to herself, "I am the Marquise de Saint-Loup," she knew that, the day before, she had refused three invitations to dine with duchesses. But if to a certain extent her name exalted the people, as little aristocratic as possible, whom she entertained, by an inverse process, the people whom the marquise entertained depreciated the name that she bore. Nothing can hold out against such forces, the greatest names succumb to them in the end. Had not Swann known a princess of the House of France whose drawing room, because anyone was welcomed there, had fallen to the lowest rank? One day when the Princesse des Laumes had gone from a sense of duty to call for a moment upon this Highness, in whose drawing room she had found only the most ordinary people, arriving immediately afterward at Mme Leroi's, she had said to Swann and the Marquis de Modène: "At last I find myself upon friendly soil. I have just come from Mme the Comtesse de X, there weren't three faces I knew in the room." Sharing, in short, the opinion of the character in the operetta who declares: "My name, I think, dispenses me from saying more,"¹⁴ Gilberte set to work to flaunt her contempt for what she had so ardently desired, to proclaim that all the people in the Faubourg Saint-Germain were idiots, people to whose houses one could not go, and,

suiting her actions to the word, ceased to go to them. People who did not make her acquaintance until after this period, and who, in the first stages of that acquaintance, heard her, by that time Duchesse de Guermantes, make the most absurd fun of the world in which she could so easily have moved, seeing that she never invited a single person from that world, and that if any of them, even the most brilliant, ventured into her drawing room, she would yawn openly in their faces, blush now in retrospect at the thought that they themselves could ever have seen any claim to distinction in the fashionable world, and would never dare to confess this humiliating secret of their past weaknesses to a woman whom they supposed to have been, owing to an essential loftiness of her nature, incapable from her earliest moments of understanding such things. They hear her poking such delicious fun at dukes and see her (which is more significant) making her behavior accord so entirely with her mockery! No doubt they do not think of inquiring into the causes of the accident that turned Mlle Swann into Mlle de Forcheville, Mlle de Forcheville into the Marquise de Saint-Loup, and finally into the Duchesse de Guermantes. Possibly it does not occur to them either that the effects of this accident would serve no less than its causes to explain Gilberte's subsequent attitude, the habit of mixing with commoners not being regarded quite in the same light in which Mlle Swann would have regarded it by a lady who is addressed by everybody as "Madame la Duchesse" and by the other duchesses who bore her so much as "cousin." We are always ready to despise a goal that we have not succeeded in reaching or have permanently attained. And this contempt seems to us to form part of the character of people whom we do not yet know. Perhaps if we were able to retrace the course of past years, we would find them devoured, more savagely than anyone, by those same weaknesses that they have succeeded so completely in concealing or conquering that we reckon them incapable not only of having ever been infected by them themselves but even of ever excusing them in others, because of their inability to imagine them. In any case, very soon the drawing room of the new Marquise de Saint-Loup assumed its permanent aspect, from the social point of view at least (for we will see what troubles were brewing in it in another connection). Now this aspect was surprising for the following reason. People still remembered that the grandest, the most exclusive parties in Paris, as brilliant as those given by the Duchesse de Guermantes, were those of Mme de Marsantes, Saint-Loup's mother. Moreover, in recent

years, Odette's salon, infinitely lower in the social scale, had been no less dazzling in its elegance and splendor. Saint-Loup, however, happy to have, thanks to his wife's vast fortune, everything that he could desire in the way of comfort, wished only to rest quietly in his armchair after a good dinner with a musical entertainment by good performers. And this young man who had seemed at one time so proud, so ambitious, invited to share his luxury old friends whom his mother would not have admitted to her house. Gilberte, for her part, put into practice Swann's saying: "Quality doesn't matter, what I dread is quantity." And Saint-Loup, always on his knees before his wife, both because he loved her, and because it was to her that he owed these extremes of luxury, took care not to interfere with tastes that were so similar to his own. With the result that the grand receptions given by Mme de Marsantes and Mme de Forcheville, given year after year with an eye chiefly to the establishment, upon a brilliant footing, of their children, gave rise to no receptions by M. and Mme de Saint-Loup. They had the best of saddle horses on which to go out riding together, the finest of yachts in which to cruise—but they never took more than a couple of guests with them. In Paris, every evening, they would invite three or four friends to dine, never more; with the result that, by an unforeseen but at the same time quite natural retrogression, the two vast maternal aviaries had been replaced by a silent nest.

The person who profited least by these two marriages was the young Mlle d'Oloron who, already suffering from typhoid fever on the day of the religious ceremony, was barely able to crawl to the church and died a few weeks later. The letter of intimation that was sent out some time after her death blended with names such as Jupien's those of almost all the greatest in Europe, such as the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Montmorency, H.R.H. the Comtesse de Bourbon-Soissons, the Prince of Modena-Este, the Vicomtesse d'Edumea, Lady Essex, etc., etc. No doubt even to a person who knew that the deceased was Jupien's niece, this plethora of grand marriage connections would not cause any surprise. The great thing, after all, is to have a grand marriage. Then, the *casus foederis*¹⁵ coming into play, the death of a simple little commoner plunges all the princely families of Europe in mourning. But many young men of a new generation, who were not familiar with the actual situation, might, apart from the possibility of their mistaking Marie-Antoinette d'Oloron, Marquise de Cambremer, for a lady of the noblest birth, have been guilty of many other errors when they

read this communication. Thus, supposing their excursions through France to have given them some slight familiarity with the country around Combray, when they saw that the Comte de Méséglise figured among the first of the signatories, close to the Duc de Guermantes, they might not have been at all surprised: the Méséglise way and the Guermantes way meet. “Old noble families of the same region may have been allied for generations,” they might have said. “Who knows? It is perhaps a branch of the Guermantes family that bears the title of Comte de Méséglise.” As it happened, the Comte de Méséglise had no connection with the Guermantes and was not even enrolled on the Guermantes side, but on the Cambremer side, since the Comte de Méséglise, who by a rapid advancement had been for two years only Legrandin de Méséglise, was our old friend Legrandin. No doubt, taking one false title with another, there were few that could have been so disagreeable to the Guermantes as this one. They had been connected in the past with the authentic Comtes de Méséglise, of whom there survived only one female descendant, the daughter of obscure and unassuming parents, married herself to one of my aunt’s tenant farmers named Ménager, who had become rich and bought Mirougrain¹⁶ from her and now styled himself “Ménager de Mirougrain,” with the result that when you said that his wife was born “de Méséglise” people thought that she must simply have been born at Méséglise and that she was “from Méséglise” as her husband was “from Mirougrain.”

Any other sham title would have caused less annoyance to the Guermantes family. But the aristocracy knows how to tolerate these irritations and many others as well, the moment that a marriage that is deemed advantageous, from whatever point of view, is at stake. Shielded by the Duc de Guermantes, Legrandin was, to part of that generation, and will be to the whole of the generation that follows it, the real Comte de Méséglise.

Yet another mistake that any young reader not acquainted with the facts might have been led to make was that of supposing that the Baron and Baronne de Forcheville figured on the list in their capacity as parents-in-law of the Marquis de Saint-Loup, that is to say on the Guermantes side. But on this side, they had no right to appear since it was Robert who was related to the Guermantes and not Gilberte. No, the Baron and Baronne de Forcheville, despite this misleading suggestion, did figure on the wife’s side, it is true, and not on the Cambremer side, because not of the

Guermantes, but of Jupien, who, the reader must now be told, was Odette's first cousin.

All M. de Charlus's favor had been lavished since the marriage of his adopted daughter upon the young Marquis de Cambremer; the young man's tastes, which were similar to those of the baron, since they had not prevented the baron from choosing him as a husband for Mlle d'Oloron, made him, as was only natural, appreciate him all the more when he was left a widower. This is not to say that the marquis did not have other qualities that made him a charming companion for M. de Charlus. But even in the case of a man of real merit, it is a quality that is not disdained by the person who admits him into his private life and one that makes him particularly useful if he can also play whist. The intelligence of the young marquis was remarkable and as they had already begun to say at Féterne when he was barely out of his cradle, he "took" entirely after his grandmother, had the same enthusiasms, the same love of music. He reproduced also some of her peculiarities, but these more by imitation, like all the rest of the family, than from atavism. Thus it was that, sometime after the death of his wife, having received a letter signed "Léonor," a name that I did not remember as being his, I realized who it was that had written to me only when I had read the closing formula: "*Croyez à ma sympathie vraie.*" The word "vraie," coming in that order, added to the given name Léonor the surname Cambremer.

The train reached Paris before my mother and I had finished discussing these two pieces of news which, so that the journey might not seem to me too long, she had deliberately reserved for the latter part of it, not mentioning them until we had passed Milan. My mother quickly came back to the point of view that for her was truly the only one, that of my grandmother. My mother had first of all said that my grandmother would have been surprised, then she would have been saddened, which was simply a way of saying that such a surprising event would have pleased her, and my mother unwilling to accept that my grandmother had been deprived of a pleasure, preferred to think that all was for the best, this news being of the kind that could only have caused her sorrow. But no sooner had we reached home than my mother felt that it was still too selfish of her to regret being unable to share with my grandmother all the surprises that life brings. She preferred to suppose that this news would not have been such to my grandmother since it merely confirmed her predictions. She wanted to see

in it a confirmation of my grandmother's divinatory powers, proof that my grandmother had a mind that was even more profound, more clairvoyant, more sagacious than we had thought. And so, in order to arrive at this point of pure admiration, it did not take her long to add: "And yet, who knows whether your poor grandmother would not have approved? She was so tolerant. And then you know, for her social status meant nothing, natural distinction was what she prized. Don't you remember, curiously enough, she liked them both. Remember that first visit of hers to Mme de Villeparisis, when she came back and told us that she found M. de Guermantes common, and on the other hand what praise for those Jupiens. Poor mother, do you remember? She said about the father: 'If I had another daughter, I'd give her to him as a wife, and his daughter is even nicer than he is.' And the little Swann girl! She said: 'I think she is charming; you will see that she'll marry well.' Poor mother, if only she had lived to see how right she was! Right up to the end, and even being no longer there, she'll continue to give us lessons in clairvoyance, in goodness, in the true appreciation of things." And since the joys that we suffered to see my grandmother deprived of were all the humble little joys of life, the intonation of an actor's voice that would have amused her, a dish she would have enjoyed, a new novel by a favorite author, Mamma said "How surprised she would have been! How it would have amused her! What a lovely letter she would have written in reply!" And my mother continued: "Just imagine, poor Swann who so longed for his Gilberte to be received by the Guermantes, how happy he would be if he could see his daughter become a Guermantes!" "Under another name than his, led to the altar as Mlle de Forcheville, do you think he would be so happy after all?" "Ah, that is true. I had not thought of it."

"That is what makes it impossible for me to be happy for the little beast; the thought that she had the heart to give up her father's name, when he was so good to her."

"Yes, you are right, all things considered, it is perhaps just as well that he never knew." With the dead as with the living, we cannot tell whether a thing would cause them joy or sorrow! "It appears that the Saint-Loups are going to live at Tansonville. Old Swann, who was so eager to show your poor grandfather his pond, could he ever have dreamed that the Duc de Guermantes would see it constantly, especially if he had known of his son's shameful marriage? And you yourself who have talked so often to Saint-

Loup about the pink hawthorns and lilacs and irises at Tansonville, he will see what you meant. They will be his property.” Thus there developed in our dining room, in the lamplight that is so congenial to them, one of those chats in which the wisdom not of nations but of families, taking hold of some event, a death, a betrothal, an inheritance, a bankruptcy, and slipping it under the magnifying glass of memory, brings it into high relief, detaches, thrusts back one surface of it, and places in perspective at different points in space and time what, to those who have not lived through the period in question, seems to be amalgamated on the same surface, the names of the deceased, successive addresses, the origins and changes of fortunes, transfers of property. Is not this wisdom inspired by the Muse whom it is best to ignore for as long as possible, if we wish to retain any freshness of impressions, any creative power, but whom even those people who have ignored her meet in the evening of their lives in the nave of the old country church, at the hour when suddenly they feel that they are less moved by eternal beauty as expressed in the carvings of the altar than by the thought of the vicissitudes of fortune that those carvings have undergone, passing into a famous private collection, to a chapel, from there to a museum, then returning at length to the church, or by the feeling as they tread upon a marble flagstone that is almost endowed with thought, which is made of the ashes of Arnauld¹⁷ or Pascal, or simply by deciphering (forming perhaps a mental picture of a fair young worshiper) on the brass plate of the wooden kneeling bench, the names of the daughters of the country squire or the leading citizen? The Muse who has gathered up everything that the more exalted Muses of philosophy and art have rejected, everything that is not founded upon truth, everything that is merely contingent, but that reveals other laws as well: the Muse of History!¹⁸

Some old friends of my mother, who belonged more or less to Combray, came to see her to discuss Gilberte’s marriage, which did not dazzle them in the least. “You know who Mlle de Forcheville is, she is simply Mlle Swann. And her witness at the marriage, the ‘Baron’ de Charlus, as he calls himself, is the old man who used to keep her mother at one time, under Swann’s very nose, and no doubt to his advantage.” “But what do you mean?” my mother protested. “In the first place, Swann was extremely rich.” “We must assume that he was not as rich as all that if he needed other people’s money. But what is there about the woman, that she hangs on to her old lovers like that? She managed to persuade the first to marry her, then the third and she

drags out the second when he has one foot in the grave to get him to serve as a witness at the marriage of the daughter she had by the first or by someone else, for how is one to tell who the father was? She can't be certain herself! I said the third, it is the three hundredth I should have said. But then, don't you know, if she's no more a Forcheville than you or I, that puts her on the same level as the bridegroom who of course isn't noble at all. Only an adventurer would marry a girl like that. It appears he's just a plain Monsieur Dupont or Durand or something. If it weren't that we have a radical mayor now at Combray, who doesn't even lift his hat to the priest, I would know all about it. Because, you understand, when they published the banns, they were obliged to give the real name. It is all very nice for the newspapers or for the stationer who sends out the invitations, to describe yourself as the Marquis de Saint-Loup. That does no harm to anyone, and if it can give any pleasure to those worthy people, I would be the last person in the world to object! What harm can it do me? As I will never dream of going to call upon the daughter of a woman who has let herself be talked about, she can have a string of titles as long as my arm before her servants. But in an official document it's not the same thing. Ah, if my cousin Sazerat were still deputy mayor, I would have written to him, and he would certainly have let *me* know what name the man was registered under."

About this time I used to see a good deal of Gilberte, with whom I had renewed my old intimacy: for our life, in the long run, is not calculated according to the duration of our friendships. Let a certain period of time elapse and you will see reappear (just as in politics, former ministers reappear, in the theater, forgotten plays are revived) friendly relations that have been renewed between the same persons as before, after long years of interruption, and renewed with pleasure. After ten years, the reasons that made one party love too passionately, the other unable to endure a too exacting despotism, no longer exist. Affinity alone survives, and everything that Gilberte would have refused me in the past, that had seemed to her intolerable, impossible, she granted me quite readily—doubtless because I no longer desired it. Although neither of us ever mentioned the reason for this change, if she was always ready to come to me, never in a hurry to leave me, it was because the obstacle had vanished: my love.

I went, moreover, a little later to spend a few days at Tansonville.¹⁹ The trip I found rather an inconvenience, for I was keeping a girl in Paris who

slept in a pied-à-terre that I had rented. As other people need the aroma of forests or the ripple of a lake, so I needed her to sleep by my side during the night and, by day, to have her always by my side in the carriage. For even if one love passes into oblivion, it may determine the form of the love that is to follow it. Already, in the heart even of the previous love, daily habits existed, the origin of which we did not ourselves recall. It was an anguish of a former day that had made us passionately desire, then permanently adopt, like customs the meaning of which has been forgotten, those homeward drives to the beloved's door, or her residence in our home, our presence or the presence of someone in whom we have confidence during all her outings; all these habits, like great uniform highroads along which our love passes daily and that were forged long ago in the volcanic fire of an ardent emotion. But these habits survive the woman, survive even the memory of the woman. They become the pattern, if not of all our loves, at least of certain of our loves that alternate with the others. And thus my home had demanded, in memory of a forgotten Albertine, the presence of my mistress of the moment whom I concealed from visitors and who filled my life as Albertine had filled it in the past. And before I could go to Tansonville I had to obtain her consent to be looked after for a few days by one of my friends who did not care for women. I went because I had heard that Gilberte was unhappy, betrayed by Robert, but not in the fashion that everyone believed, which perhaps she herself still believed, which in any case she alleged. A belief that was justified by pride, the desire to hoodwink other people, to hoodwink herself, not to mention the imperfect knowledge of his infidelities which is all that betrayed spouses ever acquire, all the more so as Robert, a true nephew of M. de Charlus, went about openly with women whom he compromised, whom the world believed and whom Gilberte on the whole believed to be his mistresses. It was even thought in society that he was too barefaced, never stirring, at a party, from the side of some woman whom he afterward accompanied home, leaving Mme de Saint-Loup to return as best she might. Anyone who had said that the other woman whom he compromised thus was not really his mistress would have been regarded as a fool, incapable of seeing what was staring him in the face. But I had been pointed, alas, in the direction of the truth, a truth that caused me infinite distress, by a few words let fall by Jupien. What had been my amazement when, having gone, a few months before my visit to Tansonville, to inquire after M. de Charlus, in whom certain cardiac symptoms had been causing

his friends great anxiety, and having mentioned to Jupien, whom I found by himself, some love letters addressed to Robert and signed Bobette that Mme de Saint-Loup had discovered, I learned from the baron's former factotum that the person who used the signature Bobette²⁰ was none other than the violinist who had played so important a part in the life of M. de Charlus. Jupien could not speak of him without indignation: "The boy was free to do whatever he liked. But if there was one direction in which he ought never to have looked, that was the baron's nephew. All the more so as the baron loved his nephew like his own son. He has tried to break up the marriage—it's really shameful. And he must have gone about it with the most devilish cunning, for no one was ever more opposed to that sort of thing by nature than the Marquis de Saint-Loup. Think of all the follies he has committed for the sake of his mistresses! No, that wretched musician may have deserted the baron as he did, by a mean trick, I don't mind saying, that was his business. But to take up with the nephew! There are certain things that are not done." Jupien was sincere in his indignation; among so-called immoral people, moral indignation is quite as violent as among other people, only its object is slightly different. What is more, people whose own hearts are not directly engaged, always regard unfortunate entanglements, disastrous marriages as though we were free to choose whom we love, and do not take into account the exquisite mirage that love projects and that envelops so entirely and so uniquely the person with whom we are in love that the "folly" that a man commits by marrying his cook or the mistress of his best friend is as a rule the only poetical action that he performs in the course of his existence. I gathered that Robert and his wife had been on the brink of a separation (although Gilberte had not yet discovered the precise nature of the trouble) and that it was Mme de Marsantes, a loving, ambitious, and philosophical mother, who had arranged and enforced their reconciliation. She moved in those circles in which the inbreeding of incessantly crossed strains and a gradual impoverishment of patrimonies bring to the surface at every moment in the realm of the passions, as in that of pecuniary interest, inherited vices, and compromises. With the same energy with which she had in the past protected Mme Swann, she had encouraged the marriage of Jupien's niece and brought about that of her own son to Gilberte, employing thus on her own account, with a pained resignation, the same atavistic wisdom that she dispensed for the benefit of the Faubourg. And perhaps what had made her at a certain moment expedite

Robert's marriage to Gilberte—which had certainly caused her less trouble and cost fewer tears than making him break with Rachel—had been the fear of his forming with another cocotte—or perhaps with the same one, for Robert took a long time to forget Rachel—a new attachment that might have been his salvation. Now I understood what Robert had meant when he said to me at the Princesse de Guermantes's: "It is a pity that your Balbec girlfriend doesn't have the fortune that my mother insists upon. I believe she and I would have got on very well together." He had meant that she belonged to Gomorrah as he belonged to Sodom, or perhaps, if he did not yet belong, that he had ceased to enjoy women whom he could not love in a certain fashion and together with other women. If therefore, apart from rare moments of retrospect, I had not lost all my curiosity as to the life of my dead mistress, I would have been able to question not merely Gilberte but her husband. And it was, after all, the same thing that had made both Robert and me desire to marry Albertine (to wit, the knowledge that she was a lover of women). But the causes of our desire, like its objects for that matter, were opposite. In my case, it was the despair into which I had been plunged by the discovery, in Robert's the satisfaction; in my case to prevent her, by perpetual vigilance, from indulging her predilection; in Robert's to cultivate it, and by granting her her freedom to make her bring her girlfriends to him. If Jupien traced back to a quite recent origin the new orientation, so divergent from their original course, that Robert's carnal desires had assumed, a conversation that I had with Aimé and that made me very unhappy showed me that the former headwaiter at Balbec traced this divergence, this inversion to a far earlier date. The occasion of this conversation had been my going for a few days to Balbec, where Saint-Loup himself had also come with his wife, whom during this first phase he never allowed out of his sight. I had marveled to see how Rachel's influence over Robert still made itself felt. Only a young husband who has long been keeping a mistress knows how to take off his wife's cloak as they enter a restaurant, how to treat her with befitting courtesy. He has, during his liaison, learned all that a good husband should know. Not far from him at a table adjoining my own, Bloch among a party of pretentious young university men, was assuming a false air of being at his ease and shouted at the top of his voice to one of his friends, as he ostentatiously passed him the menu with a gesture that knocked over two carafes of water: "No, no, my dear fellow, order! Never in my life have I been able to make head or tail of

these documents. I have never known how to order dinner!” he repeated with a pride that was hardly sincere and, blending literature with gluttony, decided at once upon a bottle of champagne that he liked to see “in a purely symbolic fashion” adorning a conversation. Saint-Loup, on the other hand, did know how to order. He was seated by the side of Gilberte—already pregnant (he was, in the years that followed, to keep her continually supplied with offspring)—as he slept by her side in their double bed in the hotel.²¹ He spoke to no one but his wife, the rest of the hotel appeared not to exist for him, but at the moment when a waiter came to take an order, and stood close beside him, he swiftly raised his blue eyes and darted a glance at him which did not last for more than two seconds, but in its limpid penetration seemed to indicate a kind of investigative curiosity entirely different from the one that might have inspired any ordinary diner scrutinizing, even at greater length, a waiter or a busboy, with a view to making humorous or other observations about him which he would communicate to his friends. This quick little glance, apparently disinterested, revealed to those who intercepted it that this excellent husband, this once so passionate lover of Rachel, had another plane in his life, and one that seemed to him infinitely more interesting than the one on which he moved from a sense of duty. But it was to be seen only in that glance. Already his eyes had returned to Gilberte who had seen nothing; he introduced a passing friend to her and left the room to stroll with her outside. It was then that Aimé spoke to me of a far earlier time, the time when I had made Saint-Loup’s acquaintance, through Mme de Villeparisis, in this same Balbec.

“Why, surely, Monsieur,” he said to me, “it is common knowledge, I have known it for ever so long. The first year when Monsieur came to Balbec, M. le Marquis shut himself up with my liftboy, on the pretext of developing some photographs of Monsieur’s grandmother. The boy made a complaint, and we had the greatest difficulty in hushing the matter up. And besides, Monsieur, Monsieur remembers the day, no doubt, when he came to lunch at the restaurant with M. le Marquis de Saint-Loup and his mistress, whom M. le Marquis was using as a screen. Monsieur doubtless remembers that M. le Marquis left the room, pretending that he had lost his temper.”²² Of course I don’t suggest for a moment that Madame was in the right. She was leading him a regular dance. But as to that day, no one will ever make me believe that M. le Marquis’s anger wasn’t put on, and that he hadn’t a good

reason to get away from Monsieur and Madame.” So far as that day was concerned, I am convinced that, if Aimé was not deliberately lying, he was entirely mistaken. I remembered too well the state Robert was in, the blow he struck the journalist.²³ And, for that matter, it was the same with the Balbec incident; either the liftboy had lied, or it was Aimé who was lying. At least so I believed; I could not be certain, for we never see more than one aspect of things. Had it not been that the thought distressed me, I would have found a certain beauty in the fact that, whereas for me sending the liftboy to Saint-Loup had been the most convenient way of conveying a letter to him and receiving his answer, for him it had meant making the acquaintance of a person who had taken his fancy. Everything, indeed, is at least twofold. Upon the most insignificant action that we perform, another man will graft a series of entirely different actions. It is certain that Saint-Loup’s adventure with the liftboy, if it occurred, no more seemed to me to be involved in the commonplace dispatch of my letter than a man who knew nothing of Wagner except the duet in *Lohengrin* would be able to foresee the prelude to *Tristan*.²⁴ True, to men, things offer only a limited number of their innumerable attributes, because of the paucity of our senses. They are colored because we have eyes; how many other epithets would they not merit if we had hundreds of senses? But this different aspect that they might present is made more comprehensible to us by the occurrence in life of even the most trivial event of which we know a part that we suppose to be the whole, and at which another person looks as though through a window opening upon another side of the house and offering a different view. Supposing that Aimé had not been mistaken, Saint-Loup’s blush when Bloch spoke to him of the liftboy had not perhaps been due after all to my friend’s pronouncing the word as “lighft.”²⁵ But I was convinced that Saint-Loup’s physiological evolution had not begun at that period and that he then had been still exclusively a lover of women. More than by any other sign, I could tell this retrospectively by the friendship that Saint-Loup had shown me at Balbec. It was only while he still loved women that he was really capable of friendship. Afterward, for some time at least, to the men who did not attract him physically he displayed an indifference that was to some extent, I believe, sincere—for he had become very curt—and which he exaggerated as well in order to make people think that he was interested only in women. But I remember all the

same that one day at Doncières, as I was on my way to dine with the Verdurins, and after he had been gazing rather markedly at Morel, he had said to me: "Curious, that fellow, he reminds me in some ways of Rachel. Doesn't it strike you? They seem to me identical in certain respects. Not that it can be of any interest to me." And nevertheless his eyes remained for a long time gazing abstractedly at the horizon, as when we think, before returning to the card table or going out to dinner, of one of those long voyages that we will never make, but for which we feel a momentary longing. But if Robert found certain traces of Rachel in Charlie,²⁶ Gilberte, for her part, sought to present some similarity to Rachel, in order to appear more attractive to her husband, wearing, like her, bows of scarlet or pink or yellow ribbon in her hair, which she dressed in a similar style, for she believed that her husband was still in love with Rachel, and so was jealous of her. That Robert's love may have hovered at times over the boundary that divides the love of a man for a woman from the love of a man for a man was quite possible. In any case, the part played by his memory of Rachel was now purely esthetic. It is indeed improbable that it could have played any other. One day Robert had gone to her to ask her to dress up as a man, to leave a long tress of hair hanging down, and nevertheless had contented himself with gazing at her, unsatisfied. He remained no less attached to her than before and paid her scrupulously but without any pleasure the enormous allowance that he had promised her, and which did not prevent her from treating him in the most abominable fashion later on. This generosity toward Rachel would not have distressed Gilberte if she had known that it was merely the resigned fulfilment of a promise that no longer bore any trace of love. But love was, on the contrary, precisely what he pretended to feel for Rachel. Homosexuals would be the best husbands in the world if they did not make a show of being in love with other women. Not that Gilberte made any complaint. It was the belief that Robert had been loved, for so long, by Rachel that had made her desire him, had made her refuse better matches; it seemed that he was making a sort of concession to her when he married her. And indeed, at first, any comparison that he made between the two women (unequal as they were nevertheless in charm and beauty) did not favor the delicious Gilberte. But the latter grew in her husband's esteem whereas Rachel visibly diminished. There was another person who contradicted herself: namely, Mme Swann. If, in Gilberte's eyes, Robert before their marriage was already crowned with the twofold

halo that was created for him on the one hand by his life with Rachel, perpetually proclaimed in Mme de Marsantes's lamentations, on the other hand by the prestige that the Guermantes family had always had in her father's eyes and that she had inherited from him, Mme de Forcheville on the other hand would have preferred a more brilliant, perhaps a princely marriage (there were impoverished royal families that would have accepted the money—which incidentally proved to be considerably less than the promised eighty millions—purged as it was by the name Forcheville) and a son-in-law less depreciated in social value by a life spent in comparative seclusion. She had not been able to prevail over Gilberte's determination, had complained bitterly to all and sundry, denouncing her son-in-law. One fine day she changed her tune completely, the son-in-law had become an angel, nothing was ever said against him except in private. The fact was that age had left Mme Swann (become Mme de Forcheville) with the taste that she had always had for being kept, but, by the desertion of her admirers, had deprived her of the means. She longed every day for another necklace, a new dress studded with brilliants, a more sumptuous automobile, but she had only a small income, Forcheville having run through most of it, and—what Jewish strain controlled Gilberte in this?—she had an adorable, but a fearfully avaricious daughter, who counted every sou²⁷ that she gave her husband, not to mention her mother. Then all of a sudden she had sniffed out and then found her natural protector in Robert. That she was no longer in her first youth mattered little to a son-in-law who was not a lover of women. All that he asked of his mother-in-law was to smooth down any little difficulty that had arisen between Gilberte and himself, to obtain his wife's consent to his going on a vacation with Morel. Odette had lent her services and was at once rewarded with a magnificent ruby. To pay for this, it was necessary for Gilberte to be more generous to her husband. Odette preached this doctrine to her with all the more fervor in that it was she herself who would benefit by her daughter's generosity. Thus, thanks to Robert, she was enabled, on the threshold of her fifties (some said her sixties) to dazzle every table at which she dined, every party at which she appeared, with an unparalleled splendor without needing to have, as in the past, a "friend" who now would no longer have coughed up, or even fallen for her. And so she had entered, permanently it seemed, into the period of final chastity, and yet she had never been so elegant.

It was not merely the malice, the rancor of the once poor boy against the master who has enriched him and has moreover (this was in keeping with the character and still more with the vocabulary of M. de Charlus) made him feel the difference of their positions, that had made Charlie turn to Saint-Loup in order to add to the baron's sorrows. He may also have had an eye to his own profit. I had the impression that Robert must be giving him a great deal of money. After a soirée where I had met Robert before I went down to Combray, and where the manner in which he flaunted himself by the side of a lady of fashion who was reputed to be his mistress, glued to her, never leaving her for a moment, enveloped publicly in the folds of her skirt, made me think of a sort of involuntary repetition of an ancestral gesture, but somewhat more skittish and jumpy, that I had had an opportunity of observing in M. de Charlus, when he appeared to be wrapped in the finery of Mme Molé or some other woman, the banner of a gynophilian²⁸ cause that was not his own but that he loved, albeit without having the right to flaunt it thus, whether because he found it useful as a protection or esthetically charming; I had been struck, as we came away, by the discovery that this young man, so generous when he was far less rich, had become stingy. That a man clings only to what he possesses, and that he who used to scatter money when he so rarely had any now hoards that with which he is amply supplied, is no doubt a common enough phenomenon, and yet in this instance it seemed to me to have assumed a more particular form. Saint-Loup refused to take a fiacre, and I saw that he had kept a streetcar transfer ticket. No doubt in so doing Saint-Loup was exercising, with a different object, talents that he had acquired in the course of his liaison with Rachel. A young man who has lived for years with a woman is not as inexperienced as the virgin for whom the girl that he marries is the first. One need only see, on the rare occasions when Robert took his wife out to a restaurant, the adroit and respectful way he took her cloak, his skill in ordering dinner and giving instructions to the waiters, the care with which he smoothed Gilberte's sleeves before she put on her jacket, to realize that he had been a woman's lover for a long time before being this one's husband. Similarly, having had to take care of the minutest details of Rachel's household budget, partly because she herself was useless as a housekeeper, later because his jealousy made him determined to keep a firm control over her domestic staff, he was able, in the administration of his wife's property and the management of their household, to continue playing

this role with a skill and experience that perhaps Gilberte might have been unable to fulfill and that she gladly left to him. But no doubt he did so mainly in order to be able to give Charlie the benefit of his candle-end economies, maintaining him in affluence without Gilberte's either knowing it or suffering from it. Perhaps even, believing the violinist to be a big spender "like all artists" (Charlie styled himself thus without conviction and without pride in order to excuse himself for not answering letters, etc., and for a mass of other defects that he believed to be part of the undisputed psychology of the artist). Personally, I found it absolutely irrelevant from a moral point of view whether one took one's pleasure with a man or with a woman, and only too natural and too human that one should take it where one could find it. If therefore Robert had not been married, his liaison with Charlie ought not to have caused me pain. And yet I knew that the pain I felt would have been as sharp if Robert had been a bachelor. In anyone else, what he did would have left me indifferent. But I wept when I reflected that I had felt in the past for a different Saint-Loup an affection that had been so great and that I could see quite well, from the cold and evasive manner he now adopted, that he no longer felt for me, since men, now that they were capable of arousing his desires, could no longer inspire his friendship. How could these tastes have arisen in a young man who had loved women so passionately that I had seen him brought to a state of almost suicidal despair because "Rachel, when from the Lord" had threatened to leave him? Had the resemblance between Charlie and Rachel—invisible to me—been the plank that had enabled Robert to pass from his father's tastes to those of his uncle, in order to complete the physiological evolution that even in the latter had occurred fairly late? At times however Aimé's words came back to my mind to make me uneasy; I remembered Robert that year at Balbec; he had had a trick, when he spoke to the liftboy, of not paying any attention to him that strongly resembled M. de Charlus's manner when he addressed certain men. But Robert might easily have derived this from M. de Charlus, from a certain hauteur and a certain physical attitude proper to the Guermantes family, without for a moment sharing the peculiar tastes of the baron. For example, the Duc de Guermantes, who had no such tastes, had the same nervous tic as M. de Charlus of turning his wrist, as though he were straightening a lace cuff around it, and also in his voice certain shrill and affected intonations, mannerisms to all of which, in M. de Charlus, one might have been tempted to ascribe another meaning, to which he would

have given another meaning himself, the individual expressing his peculiarities by means of impersonal and atavistic traits that are perhaps nothing more than ingrained peculiarities fixed in his gestures and voice. By this latter hypothesis, which borders upon natural history, it would not be M. de Charlus that we ought to style a Guermantes marked with a blemish and expressing it to a certain extent by means of traits peculiar to the Guermantes race, but the Duc de Guermantes, who would be in a perverted family the exception whom the hereditary malady has so effectively spared that the external stigmata it has left upon him lose all their meaning. I remembered that on the day when I had seen Saint-Loup for the first time at Balbec, so blond,²⁹ fashioned of so rare and precious a substance, gliding between the tables, his monocle fluttering in front of him, I had found in him an effeminate air that was certainly not suggested by what I was now learning about him, but sprang rather from the grace peculiar to the Guermantes, from the fineness of that Dresden china³⁰ in which the duchess too was molded. I recalled his affection for me, his tender, sentimental way of expressing it, and told myself that this also, which might have deceived anyone else, meant at the time something quite different, indeed the direct opposite of what I had just learned about him. But from when did the change date? If from the year of my return to Balbec, how was it that he had never once come to see the liftboy, had never once mentioned him to me? And as for the first year, how could he have paid any attention to the boy, passionately enamored as he then was of Rachel? That first year, I had found Saint-Loup unusual, as was every true Guermantes. Now he was even odder than I had supposed. But things of which we have not had a direct intuition, which we have learned only through other people, are such that we have no longer the means, the hour has passed in which we could inform our heart of them; its communications with reality are closed; and so we cannot profit by the discovery, it is too late. Besides, upon any consideration, this discovery pained me too intensely for me to be able to derive any intellectual advantage from it. No doubt, after what M. de Charlus had told me in Mme Verdurin's house in Paris, I no longer doubted that Robert's case was that of any number of respectable people and to be found even among the best and most intelligent of men. To learn this of anyone else would not have affected me, of anyone in the world except Robert. The doubt that Aimé's words had left in my mind tarnished all our friendship at Balbec and Doncières, and

although I did not believe in friendship, or that I had ever felt any real friendship for Robert, when I thought about those stories of the liftboy and of the restaurant where I had had lunch with Saint-Loup and Rachel, I was obliged to make an effort to restrain my tears.

I would, as it happens, have no need to dwell upon this visit that I paid to Combray and environs, which was perhaps the time in my life when I thought least about Combray, had it not furnished what was at least a provisional verification of certain ideas that I had formed long ago of the Guermantes way, and also a verification of certain other ideas that I had formed of the Méséglise way. I repeated every evening, in the opposite direction, the walks that we used to take at Combray, in the afternoon, when we went the Méséglise way. We dined now at Tansonville at an hour at which in the past I had long been asleep at Combray. And this on account of the seasonal heat, and also because, as Gilberte spent the afternoon painting in the chapel attached to the château, we did not take our walks until about two hours before dinner. For the pleasure of those earlier walks, which was that of seeing as we returned home the crimson sky frame the Calvary or mirror itself in the Vivonne, there was substituted the pleasure of setting forth at nightfall, when we encountered nothing in the village except the blue-gray, irregular and shifting triangle of a flock of sheep being driven home. Over half the fields the sun had already set; above the other half the moon was already alight and would bathe their whole extent. It would happen that Gilberte let me go without her, and I would move forward, trailing my shadow behind me, like a boat that glides across enchanted waters. But as a rule Gilberte came with me. The walks that we took thus together were very often those that I used to take as a child: how then could I help feeling far more keenly now than in the past on the Guermantes way the conviction that I would never be able to write anything,³¹ combined with the conviction that my imagination and my sensibility had grown more feeble, when I found how little interest I took in Combray? And I was distressed to see how little I relived my early years. I found the Vivonne narrow and ugly alongside its towpath. Not that I noticed any material discrepancies of any magnitude from what I remembered. But, separated from the places that I happened to be revisiting by the whole expanse of a different life, there was not, between them and me, that contiguity from which is born, before even we can perceive it, the immediate, delicious, and total deflagration of memory. Having no very clear conception, probably, of

its nature, I was saddened by the thought that my faculty of feeling and imagining things must have diminished since I no longer took any pleasure in these walks. Gilberte herself, who understood me even less than I understood myself, increased my melancholy by sharing my astonishment. “What,” she would say, “you feel no excitement when you turn into this little footpath that you used to climb?” And she herself had changed so much that I no longer thought her beautiful, which indeed she had ceased to be. As we walked, I saw the landscape change, we had to climb hillocks, then came to a downward slope. We chatted, very pleasantly for me—not without difficulty, however. In so many people there are different strata that are not alike (the character of one’s father, the character of one’s mother); we traverse first one, then the other. But, the next day, the order of their superposition is reversed. And finally we do not know who is going to allot the parts, to whom we are to appeal for a verdict. Gilberte was like one of those countries with which we dare not form an alliance because of their too frequent changes of government. But in reality this is a mistake. The memory of the most multiple personality establishes a sort of identity in him, with the result that he would not fail to abide by promises that he remembers even if he has not countersigned them. As for intelligence, it was in Gilberte, with certain absurdities that she had inherited from her mother, very keen. But even more than that, I remember that, in the course of our conversations during these walks, several times she said things that surprised me greatly. The first was: “If you were not too hungry and if it was not so late, by taking this path to the left and then turning to the right, in less than a quarter of an hour we would be at Guermantes.” It was as though she had said to me: “Turn to the left, then bear right and you will touch the intangible, you will reach the inaccessible remote tracts of which we never know anything on this earth but the direction, except” (what I thought long ago to be all that I could ever know of Guermantes, and perhaps in a sense I had not been mistaken) “the ‘way.’” One of my other surprises was that of seeing the “source of the Vivonne” that I imagined as something as extraterrestrial as the gates of Hell, and which was merely a sort of rectangular washhouse in which bubbles rose to the surface.³² And the third occasion was when Gilberte said to me: “If you like, we might go out one afternoon, and then we can go to Guermantes, taking the way by Méséglise, it is the nicest walk,” a sentence that upset all the ideas of my childhood by informing me that the two “ways” were not as irreconcilable

as I had supposed. But what struck me most forcibly was how little, during this visit, I relived my childhood years, how little I desired to see Combray, how narrow and ugly I thought the Vivonne. But where Gilberte confirmed for me some of the things that I had imagined about the Méséglise way was during one of those walks that after all were nocturnal even if we took them before dinner—for she dined so late! Before descending into the mystery of a perfect and deep valley carpeted with moonlight, we stopped for a moment like two insects about to plunge into the blue calyx of a flower. Gilberte then uttered, perhaps simply out of the politeness of a hostess who is sorry that you are going away so soon and would have liked to show you more of a countryside that you seem to appreciate, words of the sort in which her practice as a woman of the world skilled in putting to the best advantage silence, simplicity, sobriety in the expression of her feelings, makes you believe that you occupy a place in her life that no one else could fill. Opening my heart to her suddenly with a tenderness born of the delicious air, the breeze that was wafted to my nostrils, I said to her: “You were speaking the other day of the little footpath, how I loved you then!” She replied: “Why didn’t you tell me? I had no idea of it. I was in love with you. Indeed, I flung myself twice at your head.” “When?” “The first time at Tansonville, you were taking a walk with your family, I was on my way home, I had never seen such a pretty little boy. I was in the habit,” she went on with a vague and prudish air, “of going out to play with little boys I knew in the ruins of the donjon of Roussainville. And you will tell me that I was a very naughty girl, for there were girls and boys there of all sorts who took advantage of the darkness. The altar boy from Combray church, Théodore, who, I am bound to confess, was very nice indeed (Goodness, how good-looking he was!) and who has become quite ugly (he is the pharmacist now at Méséglise), used to amuse himself with all the peasant girls in the vicinity. As I was allowed to go out by myself, whenever I was able to get away, I used to run over there. I can’t tell you how I longed for you to come there too; I remember quite well that, as I had only a moment in which to make you understand what I wanted, at the risk of being seen by your people and mine, I signaled to you so vulgarly that I am ashamed of it to this day.³³ But you stared at me so crossly that I saw that you didn’t want to.” And, all of a sudden, I said to myself that the true Gilberte—the true Albertine—were perhaps those who had at the first moment yielded themselves with their eyes, one behind the hedge of pink hawthorn, the

other on the beach.³⁴ And it was I who, having been incapable of understanding this, having failed to recapture the impression until much later in my memory after an interval in which, as a result of my conversations, a dividing hedge of sentiment had made them afraid to be as frank as in the first moments, had ruined everything by my clumsiness. I had completely bungled things—although, to tell the truth, the comparative failure with them was less absurd—and for the same reasons as Saint-Loup with Rachel. “And the second time,” Gilberte went on, “was years later when I passed you in the doorway of your house, the day before I met you again at my Aunt Oriane’s; I didn’t recognize you at first, or rather I did unconsciously recognize you because I felt the same desire that I had felt at Tansonville.” “But between these two occasions there had been, after all, the Champs-Élysées.” “Yes, but there you were too fond of me, I felt that you were spying upon me all the time.” I did not ask her at the moment who the young man was with whom she had been walking along the avenue des Champs-Élysées, on the day on which I had set out to call on her, when I might have been reconciled with her while there was still time, the day that would perhaps have changed the whole course of my life, if I had not caught sight of those two shadowy figures strolling side by side in the dusk.³⁵ If I had asked her, I told myself, she would perhaps have told me the truth, as would Albertine had she been restored to life. And indeed when we meet again after many years women with whom we are no longer in love, is there not the abyss of death between them and ourselves, just as much as if they were no longer of this world, since the fact that our love no longer exists makes the people they were or the person we were then as good as dead? Perhaps too she might not have remembered, or she might have lied. In any case, it no longer interested me in the least to know, since my heart had changed even more than Gilberte’s face. This face gave me scarcely any pleasure, but above all I was no longer unhappy, I would have been incapable of conceiving, had I thought about it again, that I could have been so unhappy by the sight of Gilberte walking along by the side of a young man that I said to myself: “It is all over, I will never attempt to see her again.” Of the state of mind that, in that far off year, had been nothing but an unending torture for me, nothing survived. For there is in this world where everything wears out, everything perishes, one thing that crumbles into dust, that destroys itself still more completely, leaving behind still fewer traces of itself than Beauty: namely Grief.

And so I am not surprised that I did not ask her then with whom she had been walking in the Champs-Élysées, for I have already seen too many examples of this incuriosity that is brought about by Time, but I am a little surprised that I did not tell Gilberte that, before I saw her that evening I had sold an old Chinese porcelain vase in order to buy her flowers.³⁶ It had indeed been, during the dreary time that followed, my sole consolation to think that one day I would be able to tell her safely of so delicate an intention. More than a year later, if I saw another carriage about to collide with mine, my sole reason for wishing not to die was that I might be able to tell this to Gilberte. I consoled myself with the thought: "There is no hurry, I have a whole lifetime in which to tell her." And for this reason I was anxious not to lose my life. Now it would have seemed to me an inappropriate thing to say, almost ridiculous, and a thing that would "involve consequences." "Moreover," Gilberte went on, "even on the day when I passed you in the doorway, you were still just the same as at Combray; if you only knew how little you had changed!" I pictured Gilberte again in my memory. I could have drawn the rectangle of light that the sun cast beneath the hawthorns, the trowel that the little girl was holding in her hand, the slow gaze that she fastened on me. Only I had supposed, because of the coarse gesture that accompanied it, that it was a contemptuous gaze because what I longed for it to mean seemed to me to be a thing that little girls did not know about and did only in my imagination, during my hours of solitary desire. Still less could I have supposed that so easily, so rapidly, almost under the eyes of my grandfather, one of them would have had the audacity to suggest it.

And so I was obliged, after an interval of so many years, to add new touches to an image that I recalled so well, an operation that made me quite happy by showing me that the impassable gulf that I had then supposed to exist between myself and a certain type of little girl with golden hair was as imaginary as Pascal's gulf,³⁷ and which I felt to be poetic because of the long series of years at the end of which I was called upon to complete it. I felt a stab of desire and regret when I thought of the donjons of Roussainville. And yet I was glad to be able to tell myself that the pleasure toward which I used to strain every nerve in those days, and which nothing could restore to me now, had indeed existed elsewhere than in my mind, in reality, and so close at hand, in that Roussainville of which I spoke so often,

which I could see from the window of the orris-scented closet.³⁸ And I had known nothing! In short Gilberte embodied everything that I had desired during my walks, even my inability to make up my mind to return home, when I thought I could see the tree trunks part asunder, take human form. What I had so feverishly longed for then, she had been ready, if only I had had the sense to understand and to meet her again, to let me taste in my adolescence. More completely even than I had supposed, Gilberte had been in those days truly part of the Méséglise way.

And indeed on the day when I had passed her in a doorway, although she was not Mlle de l'Orgeville, the girl whom Robert had met in houses of assignation (and what an absurd coincidence that it should have been to her future husband that I had applied for information about her!), I had not been altogether mistaken as to the meaning of her glance, nor as to the sort of woman that she was and confessed to me now that she had been. "All that is a long time ago," she said to me, "I have never given a thought to anyone but Robert since the day of our engagement. And, let me tell you, those childish whims are not the things for which I blame myself most."

Notes

1. This letter, written on December 15, 1670, announces the marriage of the Grande Mademoiselle, Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, Duchesse de Montpensier (1627–93) and Antoine Nompar de Caumont, Duc de Lauzun (1632–1723). The duchess was a cousin of Louis XIV. The second letter of July 22, 1671, contains the comment about haymaking: "Faner est la plus jolie chose du monde."

2. Charles Ferdinand de Bourbon, Duc de Berry, was assassinated on February 13, 1820. As he lay dying, he recommended to his wife two young women from England who were his natural daughters with Amy Brown. The duchess raised them, provided dowries, and saw that they made good marriages. Proust makes her the grandmother of the fictional M. de Bréauté. One of the daughters became the Comtesse de Lucinge when she married the Comte de Lucinge-Faucigny.

3. See *Swann's Way*, 22.

4. See *Swann's Way*, 150.

5. This is a reference to the will of the Duc de Bourbon, son of the Grand Condé. The Duc d'Aumale inherited a fortune from the Prince de Condé, including the château of Chantilly. He later bequeathed all its fine art collections to the Institut de France.

6. Henri IV was King of Navarre from 1572 to 1610 and King of France from 1589 to 1610. He was the first king of the Bourbon dynasty. Diane, Comtesse de Guiche, called Corisande la Belle, was one of his mistresses.

7. See *Sodom and Gomorrah*, 527.

8. This is a euphemism for brothel keeper or madam.

9. Robert the Strong (c. 820–66) was an ancestor of the Capetian kings of France. He was known for his bold military leadership.

10. Gilberte is using *mater semita* in jest. *Semita* is Latin for path rather than Semite. *Pater* is Latin for father and, in this context, indicates a Semite father (Swann) as opposed to *mater semita*.

- [11.](#) Marienbad is a town in the Czech Republic. It is famous for its spa and mineral springs.
- [12.](#) Louise-Françoise, Mlle de Nantes (1673–1743) was the natural daughter of Louis XIV and Mme de Montespan. In 1685, she married Louis III de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, grandson of the Grand Condé.
- [13.](#) This forecast is based on an earlier version of the manuscript that Proust did not complete. In the concluding volume, *Time Regained*, Oriane is still very much alive and married to the Duc de Guermantes.
- [14.](#) This is a modified quotation from Jacques Offenbach's comic operetta *La Belle Hélène* (1864). The libretto was by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy. Agamemnon sings the line: "C'est Agamemnon!/Et ce nom seul me dispense/D'en dire plus long."
- [15.](#) Latin meaning a case or event covered by the provisions or stipulations of a treaty or compact.
- [16.](#) Aunt Léonie owned the "charming farm of Mirougrain." See *Swann's Way*, 132. The actual Mirougrain is less than a mile from the little town of Illiers-Combray.
- [17.](#) Antoine Arnauld (1612–94) was a famous Roman Catholic theologian, philosopher, and mathematician. Like Pascal, he was one of the leading intellectuals of the Jansenist group of Port-Royal.
- [18.](#) In Greek mythology, Clio is the muse of history.
- [19.](#) See the "overture" to *Swann's Way*, 3–9.
- [20.](#) Bobette was Morel's name in the original manuscript.
- [21.](#) In *Time Regained*, Saint-Loup and Gilberte are the parents of a single child, a daughter.
- [22.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 181–82.
- [23.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 194.
- [24.](#) *Lohengrin* (1845) was one of Wagner's early operas. Proust considered *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) to be a true masterpiece. The inference here is that the early work does not indicate the full richness and complexity of which the mature artist is capable. Such a comparison has often been made between Proust's first book, *Pleasures and Days* and the full artistic maturity of *In Search of Lost Time*.
- [25.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 346.
- [26.](#) It has been observed that Charlie is a near anagram of Rachel. For Proust's love of anagrams, see William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 310.
- [27.](#) A sou is the equivalent of a penny.
- [28.](#) In the original, *une cause gynophile*. This rare word indicates a lover of women or, as here, a lover of femininity or feminine things.
- [29.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 335.
- [30.](#) See *The Guermantes Way*, 10.
- [31.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 197.
- [32.](#) The source of the Loir River is a washhouse in front of the little church of Saint-Éman. See *Swann's Way*, 196.
- [33.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 162.
- [34.](#) For Gilberte, see *Swann's Way*, 161–62; for Albertine, see *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 403–4.
- [35.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 217.
- [36.](#) See *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, 217.
- [37.](#) After an accident in Paris on the pont de Neuilly, Pascal had hallucinations in which he saw an abyss opening before him.
- [38.](#) See *Swann's Way*, 180–81.

Synopses

THE CAPTIVE

At daybreak, my face still turned to the wall, and before I had seen above the big window curtains what tone the first streaks of light assumed, I could already tell what the weather was like. It is, moreover, principally from my bedroom that I take in the life of the outer world during this period. My mother is away at Combray taking care of my great-aunt who is ill (3). Late every night, before leaving me, Albertine used to slide her tongue between my lips like a portion of daily bread, a nourishing food that had the almost sacred character of all flesh upon which the sufferings that we have endured on its account have come in time to confer a sort of spiritual grace, what I at once call to mind in comparison is the night on which my father sent Mamma to sleep in the little bed by the side of my own (4).

Albertine's bad taste in music. Orders had been given that no one is to enter my room until I ring the bell (5). Albertine's separation from her girlfriends has the effect of sparing my heart any new anguish. This calm is a release from suffering rather than a joy. I am now conscious that I am not in love (6). My mother hides her hostility to Albertine's living with me (7). Mamma has begged me to say nothing definite to Albertine about our marriage, the thought of which is becoming more intolerable to me (8-9). I doubt whether Albertine could have put up with Mamma, who had acquired from Combray, from my Aunt Léonie, from all her kindred, habits of punctuality and order of which my mistress has not the remotest conception (9). Françoise is imbued with tradition. Her code (10). It is time for Andrée to arrive with the chauffeur, Morel's friend (11). Albertine has developed intellectually to an astonishing degree. Alone, the curious genius of Céleste might perhaps appeal to me (12). Albertine has also changed physically (13). Andrée intends to take Albertine to the Buttes-Chaumont. I trust Andrée to tell me of all the places that she visits with Albertine. Had I known of Andrée's affection for me at Balbec I might have fallen in love with her (14). I am aware that I am not the least bit in love with Albertine (15). I remain preoccupied with how she spends her time (16). With a chronic malady, such as jealousy, the slightest pretext serves to revive it (17). My suffering could end only with Albertine's life or with my own. In leaving Balbec, I had imagined that I was leaving Gomorrah; alas, Gomorrah is dispersed to all the ends of the earth (18). The exhilarating virtues of solitude (20). Françoise comes in to light the fire and throws upon it a handful of twigs, the scent of which evokes memories of my childhood (22). I employ many circumstances and pleasures to procure for Albertine in my company the illusion of the happiness that I feel incapable of giving her. I would like, as soon as I am cured, to set off for Venice (24). The idea of sacrificing everything in order to prevent Albertine from marrying someone else and to put an obstacle in the way of her taste for women now seems to me unreasonable. Jealousy is an intermittent malady (25). Before Albertine's return, I often go downstairs to ask Mme de Guermantes for details about pretty articles of clothing that I am eager to procure for Albertine (26). Albertine's republican contempt for a duchess gives place to her keen interest in a fashionable woman. The Fortuny garments made from old Venetian models (29). I enjoy in what the duchess says the pure charm of the French language no longer found in the speech or in the literature of the present day. A certain kind of aristocracy has remained in contact with the lands over which it once ruled, with the result that the simplest remark unrolls before our eyes a historical and geographical map of France (32).

I ask the duchess about the evening when she dined with Mme de Saint-Euverte and wore a dress that was all red with red shoes. What is extraordinary is that the duchess should remember nothing but what she had been wearing (34). Chaussepierre, second vice president of the Jockey Club, is elected president rather than the Duc de Guermantes, senior vice president (36). The duke blames his friendship with Swann and those who support Dreyfus for the defeat (37). On leaving the duchess, I often meet in the courtyard M. de Charlus and Morel on their way to take tea at Jupien's (41). Charlus's anger at his niece's offer to "treat" them "to a tea" (41-42). Charlus receives a letter from a page whose familiarity delights him (43). Charlus likes to pretend that Morel is jealous (44). Morel tells Charlus that he is in love with Jupien's niece and wishes to marry her (45). The idea of this marriage pleases Charlus for he feels that in this way Morel will not be taken from him. The girl herself is delightful and is often invited by ladies to their homes (47). A common misconception about rich men and their possessions (48). Charlus has forgotten Morel's criminal intention with regard to the girl (49). Morel is now in love with her but sees the marriage as offering him greater freedom to accomplish his evil plans (50). Morel's refusal to pay back all the money that Bloch has loaned him (52). Andrée, Albertine, and the incident of the syringas (53-54). At the time I saw nothing that was not perfectly normal (54). On days when I do not go down to Mme de Guermantes, I take up an album of Elstir's work, one of Bergotte's books, or Vinteuil's sonata. As I enjoy them, I unconsciously call forth from within me the dreams that Albertine inspired in me long ago. I feel a momentary passion for her, seeing her in the perspective of imagination and art.

I conceal from all my friends that she is staying in the house (55). The admissions that she would have made to me easily when we were simply good friends no longer flow from her since she suspects that I am in love with her (56). Andrée's defects have become more accentuated. The slightest look of happiness on a person's face, if not caused by herself, gives a shock to her nerves (58). As soon as jealousy is discovered, it is regarded by her who is its object as a challenge that authorizes deception. Moreover, in our endeavor to learn something, it is we who take the initiative in lying and deceit (61). Albertine takes a far keener interest in pretty things than the duchess, because poverty, more generous than opulence, gives to women what is better than the garments that they cannot afford: the desire for those garments that is the genuine, detailed, profound knowledge of them (62). She has become extremely intelligent (63). Jupien's niece has changed her opinion of Morel and M. de Charlus (66). I am perhaps the person whom Albertine least distinguishes from herself. In the charm that Albertine has in Paris, by my fireside, there still survives the desire that had been aroused in me by that insolent and blossoming cortège along the beach. Albertine, like a great actress of the blazing beach, arousing jealousy when she advanced upon that natural stage, is the same who, withdrawn by me from the stage, is sheltered now from the desires of all those who might hereafter seek for her in vain (67). Those actresses of the romantic first year no longer hold any mystery for me. They have become a mere grove of budding girls, from among whom I had plucked the most beautiful rose (68). Watching Albertine sleep (69-74). The pleasure of seeing her sleep is cut short by another pleasure, that of seeing her awaken (74). She asks me if I have written anything today. Little by little I am beginning to resemble all my relatives. If things repeat themselves it is with great variations. I am becoming more and more like my Aunt Léonie (78). Mighty attitudes of Man and Woman (79). I am trying to destroy my concerns about Albertine's possible betrayals. Beneath any carnal attraction that is at all profound, there is the permanent possibility of danger. I promise Albertine that if I do not go out with her, I will settle down to work. But the next morning, I awake in different weather beneath another clime (82). My jealousy aroused by the recollection of a remark that Aimé had made about Albertine at Balbec (85). Love is an incurable malady (86). Posthumous jealousy (88). Jealousy is often only an anxious need to be tyrannical, applied to matters of love (92). Even when you hold them in your hands, such beings are creatures of flight (93). Most often love does not have as its object a human body, except when an emotion, the fear of losing it, the uncertainty of finding it again have been infused into it (94). We live only with what we do not love (99). I attempt to telephone Andrée but the line is busy (101). The power in a given name. The

impossibility that love comes up against (102). I tell Andrée that we must at all cost stop Albertine from going to the Verdurins' (105). The revolving searchlights of jealousy (106). Albertine and I often visit one of the airfields that have recently sprung up around Paris (108). We love only what we do not wholly possess (109). I intend to break up with Albertine and leave for Venice. I postpone our rupture on discovering another of her lies (112–13). Love as reciprocal torture (113). To be harsh and deceitful to the person whom we love is so natural (114). It is no longer my mother's kiss at Combray that I feel with Albertine these evenings, but the anguish of those on which my mother scarcely bade me goodnight (115). Failing to find a way to reconcile with her after our quarrel, I crawl into my bed and cry all night long (116). Albertine asleep; her breath is the pure song of the angels (117). The street cries of Paris (119–23). On sleep and dreams (125–30, 130–33). I see what a fund of intelligence and taste have developed in her since Balbec. She is my handiwork (134). As soon as Albertine goes out, I feel how tiring is to me this perpetual presence, insatiable of movement and life. My sense that the chauffeur's vigilance is not quite what it had once been (137). After he tells me about his actions while at Versailles with Albertine, my confidence in him will be henceforth absolute (138). His explanations, absolving Albertine, make me find her even more boring than before. A chance encounter with Gilberte's former maid who reveals that when I used to go every day to see Gilberte, she was in love with another young man (140). Just to be on the safe side, I decide that I will never allow Albertine to go out unless accompanied by Andrée. The postcards that Albertine sent me from Versailles do not arrive until a week after her return (142). Street cries resumed (143–44). My longing for the young girls who deliver bread, milk, and laundry. I ask Françoise to send for one of the girls I had noticed; I will ask her to run an errand for me (145). The possibility of pleasure may be the beginning of beauty (147). Françoise returns with the dairymaid. Her arrival robs me of my contemplative charm (148). I read in *Le Figaro* that Léa is to appear in *Les Fourberies de Nérine* at the Trocadéro (151). Albertine's contradictory affirmations about her relationship with Léa. I must at all costs prevent Albertine from meeting Léa's girlfriends at the Trocadéro (153). I send a note with Françoise telling Albertine that I am greatly upset by a letter that I received from the lady on whose account I was so wretched at Balbec. I ask her to sacrifice her matinée and join me at home (160). Françoise's jealousy of Albertine (161). The influence of Françoise's daughter has begun to contaminate her vocabulary (162). Albertine has the telephone operator tell me that she is returning with Françoise (163). Françoise's refusal to use the telephone and her inability to tell the time correctly (164). I feel a keen impulse of gratitude to Albertine. I no longer feel that slightest impatience to see her (165). I sit down at the piano and turn over the pages of Vinteuil's sonata (166). Vinteuil and Wagner. Music, different from Albertine's company, helps me to descend into myself (167). The harmony of a Wagner, the color of an Elstir enable us to know the essential quality of another person's sensations (168). The great writers of the nineteenth century, such as Hugo, Balzac, and Michelet, have derived from their self-contemplation a new beauty, exterior and superior to the work itself (168–69). The exhilaration that Wagner must have felt on realizing that he had created the Tetralogy (169). I am troubled by the thought of his Vulcan-like craftsmanship (170). Morel's late evening algebra courses (171). I overhear Morel screaming at Jupien's niece "*Grand pied-de-grue!*" (173). Albertine's new and second ring (174). We drive out toward the Bois de Boulogne (175). She is changing so fast and becoming very intelligent (176). If my life with Albertine prevents me from going to Venice, I might, had I been alone, make the acquaintance of the young midinettes who are scattered about the streets. The streets, the avenues are full of goddesses (179). As soon as Albertine was a captive in my house, she lost all her colors. A memory of a far-off moment on the beach: Albertine, in the midst of her friends, was the most beautiful of them all (183). There alternates with the oppressive boredom I feel in her company a throbbing desire, full of magnificent images and of regrets (184). A chance encounter with Gisèle, whose obvious lie about why she needs to see Albertine arouses my suspicions (188). Albertine admits that she lied to me a great deal in the beginning (191). To make her chain appear lighter, the clever thing seemed to me to make her believe that I was myself about to break it (192). The death of Bergotte (193–99). I discover that Albertine

was lying when she said that she had met Bergotte the day before he died. Her charming skill in lying with simplicity (200). The operation of the mind in which conviction creates evidence. Charlus in the *pissoir* (201). After dinner, I leave to go to the Verdurins' (204). I encounter Morel, distressed over having grossly insulted Jupien's niece (206). He ends by blaming Jupien and his niece for his own behavior (208). I am relieved to get away from him (209). I have gained two things in the course of the day: the calm produced in me by Albertine's docility and the idea that Art is not a thing that is worth a sacrifice. I resolve therefore to break with her. These two things were not to be permanent. As my cab drives along the quai, I see Brichot, whose eyesight has worsened, alighting from a street-car (210).

Swann's death is a crushing blow to me (211–12). His obituary (212). It is because I have made you the hero of one of my novels that your name will perhaps live. His death makes me eager to familiarize myself with the house in which the Verdurins lived and where Swann dined so often with Odette (213). Brichot informs me that the Verdurins' new house is where Swann knew Odette in the last period (214). Charlus appears, steering toward us the bulk of his huge body, followed by an apache (217). Homosexuality that survives in spite of obstacles is the only true form. The slight dislocation of a purely physical taste explains why the world of poets and musicians so firmly closed to the Duc de Guermantes opens its portals to Charlus (219). Charlus's gift of closely observing art and fashion. He merits the nickname "the Dressmaker." I have always regretted that Charlus never wrote anything (222). Charlus on Albertine's knowledge of how to dress (223). Charlus looks forward to the marriage of Morel and Jupien's niece. One would suppose that it is a consolation to these great solitaires to give their tragic celibacy the consolation of a fictitious father hood. Charlus has wearied of the monotony of the pleasures that his vice has to offer; he requires novelty and sometimes spends the night with a woman (225). How age has changed Charlus's intonations and gestures (227). Charlus maintains that Morel is only a good little friend (229). Charlus is plunged in grief and stupefaction by a letter he opened by mistake that Léa addressed to Morel in which she addresses the latter in the feminine gender and tells him that you are "one of us" (230). Charlus learns that Morel had been on tour with Léa at a time when he assured the former that he was studying music in Germany. Charlus employs a private detective to spy on Morel (232). It is of men alone that Charlus feels any jealousy; women inspire in him no jealousy whatsoever (233). Morel is no obstacle to Charlus's fondness for other young men. Morel's growing fame as a composer and journalist might serve as a lure (234). Charlus has advised Mme Verdurin to give two parties: one in a few days' time to which she will invite her acquaintances; the other tonight to which he has issued the invitations (235). He has a low opinion of the intellectual level of society people but finds them useful as an organ of publicity (235). Charlus had thought that Bergotte might find for Morel a role as a musical columnist at some newspaper (236). Charlus has been employing Morel to write slanderous attacks aimed at the Comtesse Molé (238). Charlus tells me that I had done just as well not to bring Albertine since Mlle Vinteuil and her friend were to attend; however, he learned a moment ago that the two women never came. I attempt to disguise the intense pain I feel on learning this (239). I would gladly have allowed Albertine to go out by herself, provided that I might make certain that Albertine would not meet Mlle Vinteuil and her friend (241). Saniette arrives. His use of obsolete speech is exasperating (242). Charlus has begun to lose his bearings, as can be seen in his audacious treatment of the new young footman (243). M. Verdurin's rudeness to Saniette (244). Why the Verdurins often seek to quarrel with various members of the faithful (246). Why Morel refuses to play at a party given by Mme Verdurin's friends. Her fury at Charlus for having vetoed the guests she wished to invite to the party; the motive for her determination to "enlighten" Morel as to the ridiculous and detestable role that Charlus is making him play (247). Charlus allows one exception to his veto: Saintine, whose intelligence he admires, although Saintine erred in not consulting him before making a disastrous marriage (248). Mme Verdurin, by the bond of Dreyfusism, had attracted to her house certain writers of distinction who for the moment were of no advantage to her socially (253). At each political crisis, at each artistic revival, Mme Verdurin had collected one by one the

several scraps of what would one day be her salon (253–54). Her strength lay in her genuine love of art, the trouble that she took for her faithful, the marvelous dinners that she gave for them alone, without inviting anyone from fashionable society. Now that public taste had begun to go in for exotic forms of music, Mme Verdurin, a sort of official representative in Paris of all foreign artists, was soon making her appearance, by the side of the exquisite Princess Yourbeletief, an aged Fairy Godmother, grim but all-powerful, to the Russian dancers. The charming invasion of the Ballets Russes (254). The baron has proscribed several ladies of the aristocracy whose acquaintance Mme Verdurin had recently formed and who would have been essential to the formation of her new nucleus, this time aristocratic. She remains furious at his veto. Mme Verdurin confesses her indifference to Princess Sherbatoff's grave illness (256). Why Mme Verdurin has her nose greased with rhino-gomenol before listening to Vinteuil's music. (259). Morel's good manners (260). Charlus's maniacal desire to adopt an heir, presumably Morel. Charlus is happy to display publicly his intimacy with Morel. His conversation with other prominent men about male servants who might be available for sex (261–62). After the concert, the Verdurins plan to enlighten Morel about Charlus's reputation. What ruins Charlus that evening is his ill-breeding and that of his friends (263). Only the Queen of Naples makes a point of talking to Mme Verdurin as though she had come for the pleasure of meeting her (265). Charlus realized that his friends must not display their bad manners during the concert: it was the time for High Art. The Vinteuil septet. Mme Verdurin sits in a place apart, goddess of Wagnerism and migraines, a sort of tragic Norn (267). The concert begins; I find myself in a strange land; in the midst of this music that is new to me, right in the heart of Vinteuil's sonata (268). I feel as keen a joy as the sonata would have given me if I had not already known it. Into a roseate dawn, this unknown universe is drawn from silence and from night. This redness tinges all the sky, as dawn does, with a mysterious hope (269). I cease to follow the music in order to ask myself whether Albertine had seen Mlle Vinteuil during the last few days (271). I try to banish the thought of my mistress in order to think only of the composer (273). Although dead for many years, Vinteuil, through the sounds of these instruments that he loved, has prolonged a part of his life. If art is but a prolongation of life, is it worthwhile to sacrifice anything to it, is it not as unreal as life itself? (274). Such music is proof of the irreducibly individual existence of the soul (276). The art of a Vinteuil, like that of an Elstir, makes visible that intimate composition of those worlds that we call individual persons. The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to see the hundred universes that each of them sees, that each of them is; and this we can do with an Elstir, with a Vinteuil (277). I wonder whether music were not the unique example of what might have been—if there had not been the invention of language, the formation of words, the analysis of ideas—the means of communication between souls (278). This new tone of joy seems to characterize—from its sharp contrast with all the rest of my life—those impressions that at remote intervals I experienced in my life as starting points, foundation stones for the construction of a true life: the impression that I had felt at the sight of the steeples of Martinville, or of a line of trees near Balbec (280). How strange that this unknown type of joy should have come to me from Vinteuil, since he left nothing behind him but his sonata, all the rest being nonexistent in indecipherable scribbles (281). Mlle Vinteuil's friend had disentangled from his illegible papers the formula forever true, forever fertile, of this unknown joy, the mystic hope of the crimson Angel of Dawn (282). The promise and the proof that there exists something other, realizable through art, than the nullity that I had found in all my pleasures and in love itself (283). M. Vinteuil orders Saniette to leave the party (286). Charlus fails to have his departing guests shake hands with the Verdurins (287). The guests line up to congratulate and flatter Charlus. Charlus criticizes all that part of the evening for which Mme Verdurin was responsible (289). Several of Charlus's guests engage Charlie for different evenings to come and play Vinteuil's septet, but it never occurs to any of them to invite Mme Verdurin, who is furious (295). Charlus and Mme Verdurin realize that the Queen of Naples forgot her fan (296). The social world is the realm of nullity (298). Charlus fails to realize that by

limiting Mme Verdurin's role, he is unleashing that feeling of hatred, which was in her only a special, social form of jealousy. There is only one remedy for her, which is to make Morel choose between Charlus and herself (300). Charlus receives assurance from the general that the minister will approve awarding the medal to Morel (301–2). Mme Verdurin asks Brichot to take Charlus aside to smoke a cigarette while she speaks to Morel (302). Her malicious lies about Charlus (302–3). Homosexuality does not disgust Mme Verdurin so long as it does not tamper with orthodoxy (304). I ask Charlus whether the composer's daughter, Mlle Vinteuil, was to be present at the concert (310). I am surprised that Charlus finds Brichot a man of great merit (312). Charlus on Brichot's lecture that he attends at the Sorbonne (313). My second nature and why I have been easily led into duels. I have no opinion as to the proportion in which good and evil might be blended in the relations between Morel and Charlus, but I find intolerable the sufferings being prepared for the later (314). Charlus tells me that he owes me a great debt of gratitude for my not having accepted his proposition made long ago. I express my condolences to him on having learned of Mme de Villeparisis's death (316). I ask him about her position in society, a position that is much more brilliant than I had supposed. I am surprised to learn that the title Villeparisis was falsely assumed (317). My suffering on hearing of Mlle Vinteuil and her friend described as disreputable persons. I am seized with fear that Albertine has formed a plan to leave me. The cleverest plan is to make Albertine believe that I intend to leave her (319). Charlus on Brichot's ignorance regarding masculine reputations (320). Brichot's astonishment at Charlus's statistics: only three out of ten men are exclusively heterosexual (321). Charlus says that he is the one who introduced Odette to Swann; his and Swann's and Odette's early days together; the orgies he arranged for her (324). Charlus on members of Louis XIV's family and circle who were homosexuals (327–28). Charlus: the thing that has changed most of all is what the Germans call homosexuality. Théodore, from Combray, is now a coachman in a nobleman's service and is bisexual (331). Brichot jokingly suggests that a Chair of Homosexuality should be created for Charlus at the Collège de France (333). My cowardice in wishing to leave before Charlus's execution (334). Mme Verdurin's fury as she tells Morel lies about Charlus. Morel's astonishment and embarrassment (336). Morel's scheme regarding Jupien's niece (337). Mme Verdurin warns him about playing for society people like Mme Duras; he will be known as a little salon performer (339). She cannot resist telling him the lie that Charlus referred to him as his servant and said that his father was a flunky (340–41). Morel's anger, he calls Charlus a scoundrel. Mme Verdurin seeks to retain her victory while protecting her Wednesdays (342). Charlus enters and informs Morel that he is to receive the Légion d'honneur. Morel denounces Charlus. The extraordinary spectacle of seeing Charlus speechless, dumbfounded (343). The Verdurins retire to the outer drawing room as a sign of diplomatic rupture (346). As they and Ski talk about Charlus in tears, the Queen of Naples returns and overhears the conversation. Mme Verdurin believes that she can present Morel to the queen (347). The queen takes Charlus on her arm and leaves without allowing Morel to be introduced to her (349). Charlus is so exhausted from pneumonia that he has little leisure left in which to think about reprisals against the Verdurins (350). He asks the Archangel Raphael to bring Morel to him (351). His moral perfection vanishes with the malady that had labored on its behalf. The Verdurins' attitude toward him has become a distant memory (352). The Verdurins decide to set up anonymously a small income for Saniette, who has had a stroke (352–53). We ought never to judge other people by some memory of an unkind action, for we do not know all the good that their hearts may have realized (354). M. Verdurin's nature offers me a new aspect: the difficulty of presenting a fixed image of a character and of societies and passions (355). On the way home, Brichot speaks about Charlus and his life without the slightest reserve (356). From the street I can see the window of Albertine's room: the room of which I seem to behold the luminous gates that are about to close behind me and of which I myself had forged, for an eternal slavery, the inflexible bars of gold (360). Albertine's annoyance when I tell her that I have been to the Verdurins'. She knows that Mlle Vinteuil was to have been there (361). My surprise and pain on learning about the pretended excursion to Balbec (363–64). Albertine says that she exaggerated her ties with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend in an attempt

to impress me (365). She feels that the Verdurins look down on her. Her vulgar expression that I don't at first catch, after my offer of letting her play the chic lady by inviting the Verdurins to a grand dinner party (366). Her embarrassment and shame; she refuses to tell me what she said (367). Her fury when I lie and say that I had intended to invite her to come with me to the Verdurins that evening (368). An appalling word, of which I had never dreamed, burst upon me: *pot* (369). I have no time to lose if I am not to let her see my despair (370). I ask her to leave in the morning without my seeing her again. Albertine: Don't say we would be unhappy if we didn't part; it's only you (371). She admits that she gave her photograph to Esther (372). My desire to leave her is a falsehood, a ploy to bring about a reconciliation (374). We never see ourselves as others see us (375). My enslavement ceases to weigh upon me when I see that Albertine is so cruelly conscious of her own (379). She confesses to a three-week trip she once took with Léa (380). I realize that her words never contain an atom of truth (381). She tells me that she once went to Léa's dressing room after a performance (387). On hearing her say that she would be happier if she could stay, I propose that we try to carry on for a few weeks (388). Albertine tries to dispel my suspicions by taking care never to be alone for a moment. I am discouraged when Aimé sends back Esther's photograph, telling me that she is not the person (396). Françoise sees my life with Albertine as one of unmerited pleasures. Her unerring intuition for anything that might be painful to me (397). Albertine's presence is the only thing to which I attach any value. I find Françoise replacing among my papers a sheet on which I had jotted down a story about Swann and his inability to do without Odette (398). I give Albertine dresses or other objects to try to enhance the comfort of her life and the beauty of her prison. We consult Elstir about the furnishings of a yacht (400). As for dressing gowns, what appeals to her most is everything that was made by Fortuny (401). My captivity in Paris is made more burdensome for me by the sight of the Fortuny gowns that remind me of Venice (403). Because the sea breeze no longer puffs out Albertine's skirts, because, above all, I have clipped her wings, she has ceased to be a winged Victory, she is a burdensome slave of whom I would have liked to be rid. Albertine at the pianola (404). When it is time for a new pianola roll, often there was for me a piece of music less in the world, perhaps, but a truth the more (405). Questions of the truth of Art, of the truth of the Immortality of the Soul. Vinteuil's music seems truer than all the books that I knew (406). It is not possible that a piece of sculpture, a piece of music does not correspond to some definite spiritual reality, or life would be meaningless. This unknown quality of a unique world that no other composer has ever made us see is perhaps the most authentic proof of genius, even more than the content of the work itself (407). This is true even in literature: examples from the works of Barbey d'Aurevilly. Albertine admits that Gilberte took her home once and kissed her (408). Conversation about Thomas Hardy resumes and expands to include novels by Dostoyevsky (408–11). The Dostoyevsky side of Mme de Sévigné, who, like Elstir, instead of presenting things in their logical sequence, that is to say beginning with the cause, shows us first of all the effect, the illusion that strikes us (411). Albertine at the pianola, which is at times like a magic lantern (historical and geographical) and on the walls of this room in Paris, accordingly as Albertine plays Rameau or Borodin (414). Why I do not consider Albertine to be a work of art: I had known Swann (416). We love only that in which we pursue something inaccessible, we love only what we do not possess (417). She speaks to me of excursions made with girlfriends through the Dutch countryside. This love of woman for woman was something too unfamiliar for me to form an accurate idea of its pleasures, its quality (418). Love is space and time made perceptible to the heart. It is only from the pleasure that we ourselves have felt that we can derive knowledge and pain (419). She resembles a mighty goddess of Time (420). Mme Bontemps reveals that, three years ago, Albertine had to go every day to the Buttes-Chaumont (422). Our memory is a sort of pharmacy, a chemical laboratory, in which our groping hand comes to rest now upon a sedative drug, now upon a dangerous poison (424). The vivacity with which she is gripped by the irresistible temptation of a pleasure (425). I have no doubt that she will remain with me always. I feel that I am missing life, the world (426). All I wish is to choose the right moment to leave her. My life with Albertine is, when I am not jealous, mere boredom; when I am jealous, constant suffering

(427). I lose my temper one evening when Albertine puts on the gold and blue dressing gown by Fortuny and shows no gratitude for the sacrifices I am making for her. The gown seems to me the tempting phantom of that invisible Venice (428). She admits that she knew Mlle Vinteuil was expected at Mme Verdurin's the afternoon when she went to the Trocadéro. Her admission turns my bones to water (430).

I tell her that anonymous letters accuse her of having relations with Andrée. Her denials and anger (431). I ask her forgiveness for my anger; she does not return my kiss. I know she cannot leave me without warning me: the Fortuny gowns are to come soon. I kiss her a second time, pressing to my heart the shimmering and golden azure of the Grand Canal and the mating birds, symbols of death and resurrection (433). The pigeons begin to coo, heralding the beginning of spring (435). I waver between anxiety that Albertine might leave and a state of comparative calm. Suddenly, in the silence of the night, I am startled by a noise that fills me with terror, the sound of Albertine's window being violently opened (436). That day and the next we go out together. No longer receiving from her even those carnal satisfactions on which I depend, I find her positively ugly in her ill humor (438). I look at her, sweet and sullen, feeling that it was a pity we had not separated. I want to go to Venice (439). We drive out to Versailles, where we see an airplane, high up in the sky (440). We return home very late in the night (443). The moon is shining and I repeat to her lines of poetry or prose about moonlight (433–44). In the early morning I hear with joy an automobile beneath the window (446). The scent of gasoline revives in me the desire to make love in new places with a woman unknown (447). I wish to find myself face to face with my Venetian imaginings. Now that life with Albertine has become possible again, I feel that I can derive nothing from it but misery, since she does not love me; better to part from her in a pleasant moment with her consent, a moment that I would prolong in memory (448). I ring for Françoise to ask her to buy me a guidebook and a timetable (449). She informs me that earlier that morning Albertine asked for her trunks and a short time later departed, leaving me a letter (450).

THE FUGITIVE

1. Grief and Oblivion

"Mademoiselle Albertine has gone!" How much farther does anguish penetrate in psychology than psychology itself! I am going to have her brought back here at once (453). A moment ago I had believed that I no longer loved Albertine (454). I read Albertine's letter that ends: "Adieu, I leave with you the best part of myself." I may have to give half my fortune to Mme Bontemps to bring Albertine back (455). I believe that what she wants is for me to make up my mind to marry her (456). How far removed from me now is the desire to go to Venice (459). Every woman feels that if her power over a man is great, the only way to leave him is sudden flight. Fugitive because a queen (460). At every moment there is one more of those innumerable and humble "selves" that compose our personality which is still unaware of Albertine's departure and must be informed of it (465). Outside Albertine's house I find a poor little girl whom I take home and I hold on my knee. Her presence, making me feel too keenly Albertine's absence, is intolerable and I send her away with a five hundred-franc note (467). I can think of one thing only: employing another person to search for Albertine. Saint-Loup agrees to do so (470). Being with her matters little to me so long as I can prevent "this creature of flight" from going to this place or to that (471). At his request, I show Saint-Loup a photograph of Albertine (473–74). Let us leave pretty women to men with no imagination (476). Saint-Loup is to offer Mme Bontemps thirty thousand francs for her husband's election committee if she persuades Albertine to return (478). I run into Bloch, who angers me by revealing that he spoke to M. Bontemps about Albertine's treatment of me (480). At the Sûreté, the young girl's parents insult me (481). My happiness over the certainty that Saint-Loup's mission cannot fail (482). An inspector calls to inquire whether I am in the habit of having girls in the house. The concierge,

supposing him to refer to Albertine, answers in the affirmative (483). My fury when I receive a telegram from Robert telling me that Albertine had seen him when he called on Mme Bontemps (489). I receive a telegram from Albertine saying she would have been happy to come back if I had asked her directly. Now that I am certain of her return I must not appear to be seeking it (491). I write to Albertine telling her that I will keep the yacht and the Rolls-Royce that I had ordered for her, although they will be useless to me (494). I deny that I had sent Saint-Loup to Touraine in order to secure her return (495). I believe that the result of my letter will be that of making her return to me at once (496). I recall the way I listened to *Phèdre* and see how the declaration scene applies to me (497). Time passes, and little by little everything we have said in falsehood becomes true (500). Françoise discovers that Albertine has left her rings (502). My jealousy when Françoise observes that the two rings must have come from the same donor (502). I receive a letter from Albertine saying that she will countermand the yacht and the Rolls. The sentence from her letter that shows how gifted she has become due to my influence (508). I inform Albertine of my intention to ask Andrée to come and stay (509). Waiting impatiently in the stairwell, I overhear Saint-Loup giving a footman ideas about how to get another servant sacked (510). His description of the Bontemps house and having heard Albertine singing in an adjoining room makes me suffer unendurably. My grief turns to anger over his having failed to carry out my instructions that Albertine must not know of his presence (512). The arrival of girls and his having spotted an actress friend of Rachel's in the vicinity rekindles my jealous suspicions (514). I realize that I would never have left Albertine (515). I forsake all pride and send her a telegram begging her to return under any conditions. My telegram has barely gone when I receive one from Mme Bontemps announcing Albertine's death (516). The mail brings two letters from Albertine, written shortly before her death; in the second letter she begs to be allowed to return (517–18). To find consolation, it is not one but innumerable Albertines that I must forget (519). Françoise's reaction to Albertine's death (521). I have only one hope left: that I might one day forget her (523). I had not had the perspicacity to recognize true happiness (527). So great a wealth of memories, borrowed from the treasury of her life, seems to make it incredible that she should be dead. The memories could be ranged in the two categories whose alternation had made up the whole life of my love for Albertine: trust and jealous suspicion (531). Since merely by thinking of her, I bring her back to life, her infidelities could never be those of a dead woman (532). I send Aimé to Balbec to find out whether Albertine had done anything wrong in the bathing establishment there (534). I become aware that the life that had bored me had been delicious (535). I try to embrace the image of Albertine through my tears (536). Love alone is divine (540). I have lost not merely a woman whom I loved but a woman who loved me. My life is now only the empty frame of a work of art (541). From my prison she had escaped to go and kill herself on a horse that but for me she would not have owned (542). It seems to me that, by my entirely selfish affection, I had allowed Albertine to die just as I had murdered my grandmother (544). Why had Albertine not said to me: "I have those tastes"; I would have yielded, have allowed her to gratify them (550). I begin to believe in the possibility of the immortality of the soul (555). I feel coexisting in me the certainty that she is dead and the incessant hope that she will come into the room (556). Divided into a number of little household gods, she dwells for a long time in the flame of the candle, the doorknob, the back of a chair, and other domains more immaterial (567). Aimé takes lodgings close to Mme Bontemps's villa (568). Aimé's letter in which he reports that a laundry girl used to meet her and other girls on the banks of the Loire. The laundress: "You should have seen how she used to quiver, that young lady, she said to me: 'Oh, it's too heavenly.'" I had suffered at Balbec when Albertine told me of her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil, but Albertine was there to console me (569). The fragmentation of Albertine into many parts is her sole mode of existence in me (574). I call to mind the noble glance, kind and compassionate, of one of those Albertines (575). It is easy for me to do what I would have done had she been by my side: I forgive her (576). We are healed of a suffering only by experiencing it to the full. The painful knowledge of Albertine's guilt will be expelled from me by habit (581). Days in the past cover up little by little those that preceded them and are themselves buried beneath

those that follow them (590). Andrée mourns Albertine but I sense that she does not miss her (592). Andrée swears that she never did anything of the sort with Albertine (594). It is only in our mind that we possess things (598). The decline of my love seems to make new loves possible (600). As there is a geometry in space, so there is a psychology in time. My love is not so much a love for Albertine as a love in me. It is a tragedy of other people that they are to us merely showcases for the very perishable collections of our own mind (604).

2. *Mademoiselle de Forcheville*

Before reaching the initial stage of indifference, I would have to traverse in the opposite direction all the sentiments through which I had passed before arriving at my great love (605). I hum phrases from Vinteuil's sonata: it is my love that seems in the scattered notes of the little phrase to be disintegrating (607). Once again, as when I had ceased to see Gilberte, the love of women arises in me (608). I encounter a group of three girls whose elegant and energetic allure remind me of when I first saw Albertine and her friends (609). The blonde one darts a furtive glance at me. I conclude from what the concierge tells me that she is Mlle d'Éporcheville, whose favors Robert enjoyed in a brothel (610). I now think only of possessing her (612). I wire Robert for more details; I receive the disappointing reply that she is not Mlle d'Éporcheville. My mother brings the mail to my room and lays it casually on the bed (614). My article at last published in *Le Figaro* (616). Through the act of writing, my pleasure would be no longer in society but in literature. I visit Mme de Guermantes to form an idea of what the public thinks of my article (621). Mlle de Forcheville reveals herself as my old friend Gilberte. Gilberte is now the wealthiest heiress in France (623). Gilberte places the Guermantes above all the nobility, even the royal families (628). Mme de Guermantes has grown curious about the Swann girl and is willing to meet her. She comes to lunch with the Guermantes (629). In the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair, Forcheville, now married to Odette, adopted Gilberte to relieve her of the unfortunate name Swann (632). Once she has become Mlle de Forcheville no one dares utter the name Swann in her presence (632). The Duc de Guermantes cannot believe that I have published an article in *Le Figaro* (633). Gilberte has become a great snob (635). I decline an invitation from the duchess to go with them to the Opéra-Comique due to my period of mourning a dear friend. I tell all my friends that I have just experienced great sorrow and cease to feel it. I receive two congratulatory letters that surprise me. Bloch does not write to me (640). I have a dream in which I learn that Bergotte is a great admirer of my work (641). I am sad when I think of Mlle de Forcheville: she who ought to keep Swann's memory alive is hastening and completing the work of death and oblivion. I no longer love Albertine (643). It is not because other people are dead that our affection for them grows faint, it is because we ourselves are dying (646). I find pleasure in having semicarnal relations with Andrée, because of the collective form now resumed by my love of the little band of girls (647). I return home, where Andrée is to be waiting for me (648). I hear a man's voice reciting love poems to a person I assume to be female. I open the door to find Charlus reciting them to Morel (649). The memory of Albertine has become fragmentary and no longer causes me any sadness; it is now no more than a transition to new desires, like a chord that announces a change of key (650). Andrée tells me that Albertine and Morel used to seduce young women whom Morel abandoned afterward. Albertine felt terrible remorse and her death may have been suicide (651). Andrée confesses that Albertine had taken her to bed once when they were expecting my return home. Albertine never resumed her relations with Andrée after that, perhaps from fear, perhaps from remorse (652). Words that concern Albertine have lost their toxic power; she was already too remote from me (653). My doubts about the veracity of what Andrée told me (654). Her rage against people whom she imagines as happy or triumphant, such as Octave, the young sportsman who is living with Rachel (655). Octave, the Verdurins' nephew, is engaged to Andrée (656). He produces sketches for the theater and designs settings and costumes that equal those of the Ballets Russes (656–57). Andrée informs me that the main reason Albertine left me was due to what the girls of the little band might

think of her living with a man to whom she was not married. Andrée tells me that she and Albertine did those things in the country and at the Buttes-Chaumont (660). If true, the real Albertine whom I discovered, after having known so many diverse forms of Albertine, differed very little from the young bacchante whom I had detected, on the first day, on the esplanade at Balbec (661). I have no need to believe in Albertine's innocence because my suffering has diminished. Lying is essential to humanity (662). We are wrong in speaking of a bad choice in love, since as soon as there is a choice it can only be bad (663). The Princesse de Parme calls on my mother (665). I write and ask Andrée to come again. She says that Albertine left me because Octave was in love with her and wanted to marry her (666). Andrée swears to me that Albertine never had relations with Mlle Vinteuil or her friend (670). Albertine wanted to go to Mme Verdurin's to meet Octave and did not learn until later that Mlle Vinteuil and her friend were to be there (672). Truth and life are very arduous and there remains in me, without my really knowing them, an impression in which sorrow is perhaps dominated by exhaustion (676).

3. Sojourn in Venice

My mother takes me to spend a few weeks in Venice, where I receive impressions analogous to those I felt so often at Combray but transposed into a wholly different and far richer key (677). Ever since then, when I see a cast of the ogival window in a museum, I am obliged to hold back my tears, because the window says to me the thing that touches me more than anything else in the world: "I remember your mother so well." In Venice it is to works of art, to things of priceless beauty, that the task is entrusted of giving us our impressions of everyday life (680). I accost plebeian girls as perhaps Albertine had done, and I would have liked to have her with me (682). Now, in the absence of what is most distinctive in the person and that eludes me, what I love is youth. How my poor grandmother would have loved Venice (683). Any excursion, whether only to pay calls or to go shopping, is threefold and unique in this Venice, where the simplest social coming and going assumes at the same time the form and the charm of a visit to a museum and a trip on the sea. My mother invites Mme Sazerat to dine with us in a hotel not our own (684). I spy Mme de Villeparisis and M. Norpois at a table in the restaurant. Norpois, having been discarded from the world of politics, longs to return to it (685). Mme Sazerat is eager to get a glimpse of Mme de Villeparisis, who long ago behaved to her father like the lowest prostitute and caused his financial ruin (688). Having been told that Mme de Villeparisis was the most beautiful woman of her generation, seeing her will be a comfort. Mme Sazerat cannot believe her eyes: all she sees is a little hunchbacked, red-faced, hideous looking woman (689). Norpois's influence in the current political situation (690).

My losses in the stock market (695). I receive a telegram from Albertine, telling me that she is alive. I feel no joy at the news because I no longer love her. I am no longer the self who loved Albertine (697). I try to return the telegram to the porter, telling him that it was not for me. My love for Albertine, like my love for Gilberte, has merged in the general law of oblivion (700).

My mother and I at the baptistery. The memory of her in her place reserved there as immutably as a mosaic (702). In Padua to see the Virtues and Vices by Giotto in the Arena Chapel (704). The flying angels that remind me of pupils of Roland Garros. The young Austrian woman whom I find attractive (705). I am not certain that in Albertine's case, I have discovered anything.

After dinner I wander alone in the enchanted city (706). It was the desire for certain women, far more than certain places, that kept me while in Venice in a state of agitation that became febrile on the day when my mother decided that we would leave. The porter brought three letters, two for her, one for me, which I put in my wallet without even looking at the envelope. When she leaves for the station, I order a drink and settle on the terrace and listen to a musician sing "O sole mio" (708). Finally roused to action, I set off in haste and arrive, when the carriage doors are already shut, and find my mother in tears (712). I open the letter addressed to me: due to peculiarities of her handwriting I had mistaken Gilberte's telegram for one from Albertine (713).

4. A New Aspect of Robert de Saint-Loup

Gilberte informs me that she is to marry Robert de Saint-Loup (715). Mother's letter reveals that the young Cambremer is to marry Jupien's niece, to whom Charlus has given the title of Mlle d'Orlon (716). My mother speculates about how my grandmother would have reacted to the news of the two weddings (717–20). How society people react to news of the two marriages (720–24). Mme de Cambremer-Legrandin, being of a malicious nature, takes a dislike to her future daughter-in-law (723). Gilberte is convinced that the name Marquis de Saint-Loup is a thousand times grander than Duc d'Orléans (724). Charlus's reaction to the future husband of his adoptive daughter. Legrandin has become slimmer and moves more rapidly due in part to his habit of frequenting low haunts where he does not wish to be seen going in or coming out (725). The effect on Legrandin of Mlle d'Orlon's marriage (726). The Duchesse de Guermantes pays long visits to Mme de Cambremer (728). The creation of the world did not occur at the beginning of time, it occurs every day (729). M. and Mme Saint-Loup and their withdrawal from high society. Mlle d'Orlon dies a few weeks after her wedding. The death of a commoner plunges all the princely families of Europe into mourning (732). After we return to Paris, my mother resumes her comments about how my grandmother would have reacted to the news of the two marriages (735). Friends of my mother come to discuss Gilberte's marriage (737). I renew my old intimacy with Gilberte. I go to spend a few days at Tansonville (738). I go because I have heard she is unhappy due to Robert's infidelities (739). She believes he has mistresses whereas the truth, unknown to her, is that he is having relations with Morel. Jupien's indignation (740). Only a young husband who has long been keeping a mistress knows how to treat his wife with befitting courtesy (742). Aimé's startling revelation about Saint-Loup and the liftboy (743). Robert finds certain traces of Rachel in Charlie. Gilberte seeks to look like Rachel because she believes Robert is still in love with the actress (745). Why Odette's negative attitude toward him is completely reversed (747). Charlie's motives for abandoning Charlus and turning to Saint-Loup. I pay a short visit to Combray (747). Saint-Loup has become stingy. Talents that he acquired during his liaison with Rachel (747–48). The physical resemblance between Rachel and Charlie (749). Although I do not believe in friendship, when I think about the stories of the liftboy and the restaurant where I had lunch with Saint-Loup and Rachel, I find it hard to hold back my tears. The walks I take with Gilberte are often those that I took as a child (751). My faculty of feeling and imagining things must have diminished since I no longer take any pleasure in these walks (752). The "source of the Vivonne" is merely a washhouse; the two "ways" are not as irreconcilable as I had supposed. Gilberte reveals that she was in love with me and flung herself at my head twice (753). How she used to play with little boys at Roussainville. What she really meant by the vulgar gesture. I realize that the true Gilberte, the true Albertine were perhaps those who yielded themselves at the first moment (754). There is one thing that crumbles into dust, leaving behind fewer traces of itself than Beauty: namely Grief (755).